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**Disability, Impairment and Embodied Difference
in Late-Medieval Drama:
Constructions, Representations, and the
Spectrum of Signification**

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PhD in English Literature

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Declaration

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh.

I declare that all written work, unless cited, is my own original work. None of this material has been previously submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

This research has resulted in two peer-reviewed publications, the first taken from a condensed version of an earlier draft of chapter one, and the second from a condensed version of an earlier draft of chapter two. These papers are:

Helen F. Smith, "Sinfulness, Sanctity and Bodily Transgressions: Representations of Ageing, Disability and Impairment in Late-Medieval Drama" *Mirabilia* 18:1 (2014): pp. 206-224.

Helen F. Smith, "The Afflicted Jewish Body: Cure and Conversion in Medieval Drama" Selected Proceedings from 'The Maladies, Miracles and Medicine of the Middle Ages' ed. Ruth Salter. *The Reading Medievalist: A Postgraduate Journal* 2 (2015): pp. 109-134.

These papers can be consulted in the appendix of this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the spectrum of signification of disability, impairment and embodied difference in medieval drama. Drama is an important medium in which to explore what the body is used to signify as it provides an extra dimension in the physical embodiment and performance of these physical and spiritual conditions. Despite the value of medieval drama in understanding the significations of physical and psychological affliction, it remains a neglected area of scholarly research.

In order to understand the meaning of dramatic representations of disability and impairment, it is necessary to explore the spectrum of signification attached to these conditions, since they could elicit such unstable and ambivalent responses. In this endeavour, this thesis consults medical, historical and cultural sources in addition to play-texts and performance evidence in order to understand the construction and representation of specific types of physical and psychological affliction in medieval drama, and what these conditions are used to signify through the body.

Over the four chapters of this thesis I examine the ageing body (chapter 1); the unconverted Jewish body (chapter 2); the disease of leprosy (chapter 3); and wounds, mutilation and dismemberment (chapter 4). The play-texts I use deliberately draw upon a wide range of characters and personified abstractions, from the moral and the sacred to the immoral and the profane, from biblical drama to morality plays. These diverse conditions and identities allow an overarching insight into their use and meanings in medieval drama. Similarly, the diverse range of characters allows me to consider how the body is used to reflect the moral and spiritual condition of a character through the embodied mode of dramatic performance.

For each of my chapters, the conditions I discuss possess ambivalence in their contrasting meanings, which binds the thesis together as a whole in acknowledging the changing and contrasting significations of disability, impairment and embodied difference according to the context.

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I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Sarah Carpenter with whom it has been a great pleasure to develop my thesis.

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In remembrance of Paul Hunt.

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Abbreviations

General:

aft. – after
c. – circa
l. (or) ll. – line(s)
n.d. – no date
p. (or) pp. – page(s)
repr. – reprint
s.d. – stage directions

Plays:

BM – *Bewnans Meriasek*
Ch. CP – *The Corvisors' Play, The Chester Mystery Cycle*
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Ch. WP – *The Wrightes' Play, The Chester Mystery Cycle*
CoP – *The Castle of Perseverance*
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PC – *The Passio Christi, The Ordinalia*
PoA – *The Play of Adam (Ordo Representacionis Ade)*
PotS – *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*
T. PoM – *The Purification of Mary, The Towneley Plays*
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Y. DT – *Doubting Thomas, The York Corpus Christi Plays*
Y. PoV – *The Purification of the Virgin, The York Corpus Christi Plays*
Y. TaM – *Joseph's Troubles About Mary, The York Corpus Christi Plays*

Introduction

Physical and psychological disability, impairment and sickness, were significant parts of medieval life, just as they are today. Disabilities and impairments could be acquired through accidents, injuries, genetic predisposition, or developed over time – perhaps as a result of ageing or through environmental factors. Other aspects of medieval life such as poor diet, hygiene and sanitation placed rich and poor at risk of sickness, as well as diseases such as leprosy, which could deform and impair the body. Yet, concepts of health, disease and the physical or psychological limitations of the body have not remained unchanged throughout history. Consequently, there are a number of crucial differences in the way that disability, impairment and affliction were constructed and perceived in the Middle Ages.

A crucial difference between modern and medieval approaches to disability, impairment and affliction lies in the medieval view of the body. In medieval cultural thought, there was a complex interrelationship between the body and the soul, which was central to ideas about existence. Although there is no simple explanation of the idea in the medieval period and it can be traced back much earlier, this relationship influenced and was expressed in ecclesiastical, theological, philosophical, and even medical thought. The condition of the body was thought to correspond with the condition of the soul. Thus, signs or symptoms of physical or psychological health or sickness, bodily ability or disability, could be read as direct signifiers of an individual's moral and spiritual condition, displaying whether they were sinful or virtuous. As even the layperson would have been aware of the interrelation between the body and the soul, this idea would have shaped public interpretation of the body in its various physical manifestations.

The complex interrelationship between body and soul is evident in many different texts that discuss the physical health or condition of the body. Even in early Christian theology St. Augustine wrote:

To the Almighty Physician no infirmity is incurable ... the human physician is sometimes deceived and promises health in the human body. Why is he deceived? Because he is treating what

he has not made. God, however, made your body, God made your soul. He knows how to restore what He has made.¹

Here, St. Augustine separates the power and knowledge of the physician from that of Christ as the divine physician (*Christus Medicus*), since only God is capable of curing the human body without fail. Even though St. Augustine refers to God's separate creation of the body and the soul, he appears to imply that God's restoration of the soul affects the body within this context of curing infirmity. This demonstrates the belief that the infirmity of the body is connected with its spiritual and moral condition.

The correspondence between infirmity, morality and spirituality can be seen even more directly in Canon 22 of the Fourth Lateran Council. This thirteenth-century edict defined sin as a potential cause for physical affliction, and confession and repentance as its remedy:

Since bodily infirmity is sometimes caused by sin, the Lord saying to the sick man whom he had healed: "Go and sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee" (John 5:14), we declare in the present decree and strictly command that when physicians of the body are called to the bedside of the sick, before all else they admonish them to call for the physician of souls, so that after spiritual health has been restored to them, the application of bodily medicine may be of greater benefit, for the cause being removed the effect will pass away.²

This edict uses the physician treating a patient with medicine as a parallel to the effect of repentance (via the priest) upon the recovery of the body, demonstrating the interrelated physical, moral and spiritual condition of the body. Biblical material is used as a form of evidence in support of the idea that sinfulness can cause and even directly correspond with the severity of infirmity. Yet, at the same time, the edict acknowledges that bodily infirmity is only *sometimes* caused by sin, thus illustrating that the causes and signification of infirmity can be variable.

¹ As cited in: John Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 113-114.

² "Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215, The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council", in: *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, ed. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp>>

In contrast, in the same century the *Ancrene Wisse*, a guide for anchoresses, saw physical affliction as spiritually beneficial rather than as a result of sin:

Thus is secnesse sawlene heale, salve of hire wunden, scheld,
thet ha ne kecche ma, as Godd sith thet ha schulde, yef secnesse
hit ne lette.³

In this text, the sickness of the body heals the soul through its experience of suffering. This is because meditation on the suffering of Christ and suffering in *imitatio Christi* became an increasingly central focus of medieval Christian devotion. Into the fifteenth century, Margery Kempe also represents physical infirmity as a means to devotional and spiritual improvement, for she speaks of the:

solas and comfort whan sche sufferyd any dyseses for the lofe of
God and for the grace that God wrowht in hyr.⁴

Since sickness and disease could be a means to spiritual improvement, physical affliction became desirable. The affliction of the body was not only valued when it occurred, but could also be self-inflicted. For instance, in Christine Ebner's spiritual autobiography from the fourteenth century, she flagellates herself with nettles, switches and thorns in imitation of the scourging of Christ and cuts a cross into her chest.⁵ In a popular fifteenth-century translation of *An Alphabet of Tales*, one tale is of a saint who specifically *prays* for physical and mental affliction to regain a state of purity. The saint, who 'had a grete vertue in castynge oute of ffendis' was ashamed to find that:

he cachid a pride here-of in his harte, to so mekill þat his vertue
faylid in hym, and when he saw þat, he repented him &
besought God at he mott be made lyke þaim at he had curyd.⁶

³ *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/hasenfratz-ancrene-wisse>> Part Four, ll. 59-60.

⁴ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/staley-the-book-of-margery-kempe>> Book 1, Part 1, ll. 35-37.

⁵ Ben Morgan, *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Western Self* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 88.

⁶ *An Alphabet of Tales: An English 15th Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum*, ed. Mary MacLeod Banks (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1905), Part II, Tale 739, ll. 19-22, p. 493.

These examples of the spiritual and moral value of bodily affliction suggest that the signification of the body was interpreted according to its context. Margery Kempe is also a valuable example of just how widespread it was to conflate the physical, spiritual and moral experiences of the body in late-medieval religious life.

Medieval medicine, through the theory of the humours, also connected the physical health of the body to its moral and spiritual condition. A person's humoral composition consisted of a balance of four bodily elements: blood (hot and wet), phlegm (cold and wet), choler (hot and dry), and black bile (cold and dry). The balance of these elements was understood to affect physical and psychological health as well as moral and spiritual condition. Thus, an imbalance of humours could be the cause of sickness, madness and diseases such as leprosy, but also of changes in temperament, and even morality or religious beliefs. Consequently, the expulsion of bodily waste, sweat, and loss of blood could be recommended to improve the physical, psychological, moral or spiritual condition of the body by affecting the balance of the humours.⁷ In the Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York, the text surrounding the illustration of a vein man notes that 'the vayne in the bake' was 'gud to be opynd for the purgyeng of malencolye'.⁸ The purging of melancholy could have moral and spiritual significance, since an excess of melancholy (also known as black bile) could be associated with immorality and a lack of faith in God. For instance, Hildegard of Bingen in her *Causes and Cures* from the twelfth century writes:

For when Adam knew what was good and by eating the apple did what was evil, black bile rose up within him in reaction to this change. Without the suggestion of the devil, [black bile] is not present in humans ... because the sorrow and despair which Adam experienced in his transgression arise out of black bile.⁹

She continues to explain that:

⁷ Cordelia Warr, "Changing Stigmata", in: *Wounds in the Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 53.

⁸ "Drawing of Vein Man, in the Guildbook of the Barber Surgeons of York", British Library Website (2009), <<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/egermanucoll/d/011ege000002572u00050000.htm>>

⁹ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, ed. Faith Wallis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 357.

at Adam's fall the devil scorched the melancholy within him, and in this way [the devil] sometimes makes a person subject to doubt and lack of faith.¹⁰

Hildegard outlines how this humour makes an individual vulnerable to immoral actions as well as a lack of faith in God. Thus, medical constructions and perceptions of the composition of the body through the humours also reflected on the moral and spiritual condition of the individual.

So far, evidence from ecclesiastical, theological, philosophical, medical and cultural thought has demonstrated not only how the physical, psychological, moral and spiritual conditions of mankind are intertwined, but also how ambivalent the body can be in what it signifies. It is therefore of little surprise that ambivalent and contrasting significations of the body can be found for many different forms of disability and impairment. Blindness, for instance, could be perceived as an exemplary quality in the Christian body. In St. Bonaventure's *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, the blindness of the saint is attributed to his religious devotion:

He preferred to lose his sight rather than to repress the devotion of his spirit and hold back the tears which cleansed his interior vision so that he could see God.¹¹

This positive signification is in direct contrast to the representation of St. Paul's blindness in the text of Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, which specifically attributes his disability to the sin of pride. Prior to his recovery, Christ commands Paul to:

Take upon yourself the depths of my humility and rid your eyes of the scales of pride.¹²

Blindness is responded to positively in the virtuous, Christian body and negatively in the immoral or non-Christian body. This raises a number of questions. In particular, it prompts us to consider whether there is a spectrum of signification for each specific type of disability and impairment, where we see these different interpretations, and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

¹¹ As cited in: Scott Wells, "The Exemplary Blindness of Francis of Assisi", in: *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. J. Eyler (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 77.

¹² Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, ed. and trans. W. Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 119.

what causes meanings to change. It also prompts the question of whether representations of disability and impairment are ever explorations of such conditions in their own right, or are always symbolic beyond themselves.

One familiar gospel episode actively questions the meaning of the disabled body. This episode, which concerns the healing of the Blind Man in the gospel of *John* (9:3), is dramatised in the *Chester Glovers' Play* [Ch. *GP*], in which the Blind Man's disability is specifically discussed in terms of what it may represent about his moral and spiritual condition. The play provides striking evidence that medieval people were aware of different possible origins and implications of disability, and represents Christ's own reflections on the meaning of blindness. After the Blind Man explains that he is 'blynd and never did see' (C. *GP*, l. 41), Peter and John begin to speculate on the man's condition, posing their questions to Christ.¹³ First, Peter asks:

why this man borne blynd was.
Is it for his owne trespas
or elles for his parentes?
(Ch. *GP*, ll. 45-47).

Here, Peter suggests that the disability of the Blind Man could have been caused either by personal or inherited sin. John, likewise, interprets this condition as having been caused by sin, asking whether the cause was original sin:

Was synne the cause oryginall,
wherin we be conceived all,
that this blynd man was brought in thrall?
(Ch. *GP*, ll. 48-50).

The same questions are asked in the gospel episode, and it is important that these ideas on the potential causes of disability and impairment were in circulation in the medieval period. Christ, however, interprets the man's blindness completely differently from Peter and John, responding that:

Hit was neither for his offence
neither the synne of his parentes,
or other fault or negligence

¹³ *The Glovers' Play*, in: *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, eds. R. Lumiansky and D. Mills (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 231. All further references are to this edition.

that hee was blynd borne;
but for this cause spetialllye:
to sett forth Goddes great glorye,
his power to shewe manifestlye,
this mans sight to reforme
(Ch. *GP*, ll. 51-58).

Christ's response to Peter and John explains the role of the disabled or impaired body as a means of portraying the power of God through its restoration. This response indicates that the signification of the Blind Man's disability is, in a moral sense, neutral: the disability functions as a 'defect' to be miraculously overcome. The restoration of the condition becomes miraculous through its medical incurability. The Blind Man himself highlights the significance of his cure for he describes:

There is noe man that ever could
restore a creature to his sight
that was blynd borne and never sawe light
(C. *GP*, ll. 220-222).

Although we can speculate that the Blind Man must be worthy of receiving such a cure, he is never defined by his moral and spiritual condition. This demonstrates that the disabled or impaired body can possess signification beyond the interpretation of the moral and spiritual condition of the individual. Thus, the *Chester Glovers' Play* draws attention to the ambiguous and multivalent symbol of the body in medieval culture as well as in dramatic performance. Even though the meaning of blindness is explored, what it signifies in relation to the Blind Man is rendered 'neutral' in its specific function to portray the power of Christianity.

In this dissertation I will focus on representations of disability in medieval drama, in order to explore the different meanings attributed to the disabled or impaired body. Drama is an important medium since in addition to providing verbal descriptions and representations of characters it also provides an extra dimension in the physical embodiment and performance of disability and impairment, thus offering a particularly striking means of signification. As Beckwith has noted, '[i]t is a special

property of theatre that everything onstage is a sign'.¹⁴ Whereas Beckwith makes this remark with regard to properties and material objects, it can also be applied to representations of the condition of the body, especially since the body and soul were interrelated concepts. The physical performance of disability or impairment in medieval drama can also act as a 'sign', whether this is with body paint for wounds, walking sticks for old age, or a condition such as madness conveyed through wild, erratic movements. The performance of physiological or psychological impairment could convey specific information about the identity of the character to the audience, symbolising and defining the moral and spiritual condition of the individual. Pearman has made the vital point that:

[i]mpairment, in its sheer physicality, demands that scholars investigate the actual shape of the body and its ability and not simply the discourses that shape how the body and its ability are interpreted.¹⁵

Thus, an examination of the dramatic representation and performance of the body offers a means by which this neglected area of medieval disability studies can be explored.

There is a range of different examples of disability and impairment to draw upon from the corpus of medieval drama, which contains a variety of fictional characters and personified abstractions. Medieval drama also presents biblical characters that have been consistently represented as disabled or impaired over history, as well as afflictions attributed to characters where no such condition existed in biblical sources. For each of these types of character, disability and impairment is almost always used symbolically, highlighting the moral and spiritual condition of the individual or abstraction. These different character types enable us to explore the different reasons for and functions of the ways in which disability and impairment is represented in drama. It is a defining technique of medieval drama that many characters introduce themselves directly to the audience in speeches that

¹⁴ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 62.

¹⁵ Tory Pearman, "Introduction", in: *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical and Religious Doctrines of the Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy Turner and Tory Pearman (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), p. 7.

reflect upon their character, background, and even their bodies. Other characters also respond to the bodies of those around them. In addition to these textual representations from speech and stage directions, there is also information on costuming, props, staging conventions and evidence surrounding the performance and reception of drama that can be utilised in understanding the performance of disability. Thus, in addition to the different uses of various character types in drama, there is also a wealth of textual and physical information that allow us to understand the constructions, representations and responses to the disabled or impaired body.

The signification of physical or psychological affliction within individual plays is not stable, and can change according to a character's moral and spiritual development or decline. Thus, disability and impairment can be more complex than either simply 'positive' or 'negative' for a single character, and signification can also be ambiguous. In a number of plays with narratives of cure and conversion, for instance, whilst the affliction may initially have a negative signification it can become a means of atonement and redemption. In these conversion plays, belief in Christ cancels out physical or psychological impairment, for impairment and Christianity never overlap. Thus, as the moral and spiritual conditions of these characters improve, the justification for their (continuing) affliction becomes obsolete – it has served its purpose. This is how the meaning of the disabled or impaired body can become unstable in the play-texts and performances of medieval drama.

Modern and Medieval Disability and Impairment:

Throughout this thesis, there are distinctions between my uses of the terms 'disability' and 'impairment', and late-medieval terminology, definitions and understanding of these concepts. My use of the terms follows the modern definitions, as adopted by Rushton, where:

impairment is any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomic structure or function; *disability* is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cory Rushton, "Introduction: Punishment and Pity", in: *Disability and Medieval Law: History, Literature, Society*, ed. Cory Rushton (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 5.

Conditions that I discuss as forms of disability and impairment also take into consideration, as the World Health Organisation has defined, that:

disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives.¹⁷

Given the complex interrelationship of body and soul in the Middle Ages, in this thesis, the word 'impairment' is also used to refer to forms of impairment beyond the body, such as moral and spiritual impairment. My use of 'moral impairment' encompasses sins and vices, and implies a failure to adhere to the cultural standards of moral behaviour of the time. My use of 'spiritual impairment' implies a failure to adhere to the (Christian) spiritual beliefs or values of the time, and can be applied, for example, to heretics and idolaters, as well as to Christians who do not uphold faith in Christianity.

I also use the term 'embodied difference' to refer to manifestations of 'otherness' that are seen as being encompassed within the body during the medieval period.¹⁸ For example, the unconverted Jews embodied cultural constructions of Jewishness, which conflated religious belief with racial origin. This construct of Jewish 'otherness' was particularly associated with immorality, and susceptibility to sickness, disability and impairment. Consequently, any marker of Jewish identity: morals, facial characteristics, or clothing, could be understood to portray their embodied difference. Whilst such a classification of 'embodied difference' was not used in the medieval period, it is a useful way of acknowledging this response to the Jewish identity and its forms of 'defectiveness'. However, 'embodied difference' is not a term that is only applied to the Jews, and there are further forms of 'otherness' that relate to impairment. Metzler has raised the important point that:

[b]eing physically impaired in the Middle Ages may not automatically be part and parcel of one's identity; one may have

¹⁷ "Disabilities", World Health Organisation Website (n.d.),
<<http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>>

¹⁸ A similar term "embodied Otherness" has also been used to the same end by scholars such as Tory Pearman. See: Pearman, "Introduction" pp. 2-3.

an identity as a *woman*, a *Jew*, an *old* person, but not as a *disabled* person.¹⁹

These three identities, of being female, Jewish, or an older person, are each associated with defectiveness in the medieval period, thus justifying my use of the terminology 'embodied difference'. In the medieval period to be a woman could in some discourses itself be considered a defect. St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, argues that:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force.²⁰

For old age, in the trope of the Seven Ages of Man, the final age of man's life is often named Decrepitude and was associated with cognitive as well as physical decline – thus old age was directly associated with impairment. Therefore, the impairments associated with these identities may not necessarily be classified as 'disabled' in medieval eyes, but would have been viewed as a form of embodied difference. Green has explained how important cultural differences are in determining different perceptions of the body. Different societies:

saw a different body than we do, not necessarily because the physical body itself differed significantly, but because their intellectual structures of explanation and their social objectives in controlling the body differed.²¹

Here, Green highlights the importance of understanding the body in its historical context through its own social, cultural, theological, or medical constructions. By taking these contexts into account, my identification of medieval forms of embodied difference aims to explore the meaning of disability and impairment without anachronistic judgements. In addition, by taking the interrelated body and soul into

¹⁹ Irina Metzler, "Disability in Medieval Europe: Theoretical Approaches to Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100- c. 1400" (PhD diss., University of Reading, 2001), p. 90.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (North Carolina: Hayes Barton Press, 2006), Reply to Objection 1, p. 856.

²¹ Monica Green, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 1.

perspective, this thesis can explore how moral and spiritual conditions relate to disability and impairment in medieval life.

Would the categories of disability and impairment that we recognise today be recognised in the Middle Ages? In the medieval period, as Metzler has pointed out, there was no ‘fully delineated concept of disability’ nor was there an umbrella term for disability in general.²² Yet, there were umbrella terms that covered a limited range of physiological and psychological conditions. In Middle English, the term for sickness (*siknes/siknesse/sicknes*) for example, could be used to refer to an ‘abnormal’ state of health as well as specific psychological or physical disorders.²³ The term *disease* was also used to mean bodily infirmity or disability, sickness, illness, disease, discomfort and distress.²⁴ The use of vernacular English terminology became increasingly popular in the mid-fourteenth century and a number of medical texts were translated into Middle English at this time.²⁵ Before this, Medieval Latin had been the dominant language in authoritative texts of medicine. As Metzler has pointed out, in Medieval Latin, the terms *infirmi*, *aegri* and *egroti* were interchangeable for disability, sickness and impairment, with disability as a concept also vaguely acknowledged in terms such as: *defectus*, *decrepitus*, *malformans*, *deformans*, *imbecillis* and *impotens*.²⁶ Thus, whilst the singular terms such as *defectus* and *decrepitus* could be used in order to refer to a crippled person, the plural terms *defecti* and *decrepiti* could encompass many more conditions. In addition, a large number of terms existed for medical and physiological conditions and their characteristics, which today would be classified under the terms disability and impairment. Recognised conditions include:

the crippled (*contracti*, *defecti*, *decrepiti*), blind (*caeci*), mute (*muti*) or deaf (*surdi*) people, epileptics (*epileptici*) or people with

²² Metzler, “Disability in Medieval Europe” p. 8.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See: “disēse”, *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Frances McSparran (2013), <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED11902>> See also: “disease”, in: *Middle English Literature: A Historical Sourcebook*, ed. Matthew Boyd Goldie (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 278.

²⁵ Irena Pochop, “Disease: Medical Terminology in Middle English”, University of Toronto Website (2005), <<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~cpercy/courses/6361pochop.htm>>

²⁶ Metzler, “Disability in Medieval Europe” p. 8.

morbus caducus) and children born with congenital deformities.²⁷

This evidence is indicative of the medieval acknowledgement of disability and impairment in the forms of different psychological or physical conditions affecting the health or life of an individual. The acknowledgement of these conditions throughout medieval culture can also be seen in the fifteenth century writings of, for example, Christine de Pizan, in the *Book of the Body Politic*:

just as the human body is not whole, but defective and deformed when it lacks any of its members, so the body politic cannot be perfect, whole, nor healthy if all the estates of which we speak are not well joined and united together.²⁸

This use of the impaired body as a metaphor for the body politic demonstrates the cultural applicability of the *idea* of the social, cultural and physical limitations caused by disability or impairment.

There are a number of different forms of disability and impairment that appear throughout the corpus of medieval drama. There are cripples, the lame, the sick, the deformed, the diseased and the wounded, those suffering from insanity, impotence and cognitive decline, and many other physiological conditions. These conditions are represented in different contexts with various significations. Blindness, for instance, features as a natural impairment of older age for Simeon in the York *Purification of the Virgin* (among other plays); a divinely inflicted punishment in the *Conversion of St. Paul*; and a metaphor for Jewish spiritual impairment in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*. Dismemberment occurs as a divine punishment in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, but is a glorious sacrifice for Christianity in the Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine*. Leprosy is a divine punishment for Constantine in *Bewnans Meriasek*, but a divine gift for the Smith in the Cornish *Ordinalia*. Like the disability of the Blind Man in the Chester *Glovers' Play*, leprosy has a (morally and spiritually) neutral signification for the First and Second Lepers of *Bewnans Meriasek*, the Emperor

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 90.

Tiberius Caesar in the *Ordinalia*, and Simon the Leper in the Chester *Corvisors' Play*, specifically demonstrating the power of God in the cure of an incurable disease.

As this thesis explores the spectrum of signification of disability, impairment and embodied difference, I examine a diverse range of conditions. This includes the disabilities and impairments associated with older age; with race (specifically the Jews); the physical and social consequences of the disease of leprosy; and acquired forms of disability and impairment such as wounds, mutilation and dismemberment. I explore a wide spectrum of characters, ranging from the profane to the sacred, in order to achieve an informed understanding of how disability, impairment, and embodied difference is constructed, represented and responded to in the late-medieval period, as well as how it is used and what it is used to signify in medieval drama.

Context of Scholarship:

The examination of disability and impairment in the field of medieval studies has been an emerging focus over the last decade. In 2010, the combination of medieval studies and disability studies as an interdisciplinary focus was still being described as a recent development by Eyler, reiterated by Pearman in 2011.²⁹ Thus, the examination of disability and impairment represents an important and burgeoning new area of research.

One of the most valuable and influential works of research into medieval disability is Metzler's seminal *Disability in Medieval Europe: Theoretical Approaches to Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400* published in 2005, based on her doctoral thesis of 2001. In this book, Metzler pays particular attention to the assumption that 'physical impairment and sin were intrinsically linked during the medieval period', a particular topic of interest in my own thesis.³⁰ She argues that 'medieval attitudes to the impaired emerged as ambivalent and fluctuating' after consulting a range of historical sources from medicine to literary representations. This is also a finding of a number of subsequent studies. Most

²⁹ See: Joshua Eyler, "Introduction: Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges", in: *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua Eyler (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 4. See also: Pearman, "Introduction" p. 6.

³⁰ Metzler, "Disability in Medieval Europe" abstract.

crucially, Metzler's book provides a theoretical framework for discussion of disability in the Middle Ages. Its numerous citations since publication, with specific regard to its theoretical framework, are a testament to its lasting influence in this emerging subject.

With the exception of Metzler, the vast majority of studies concerning disability as a central focus date from 2010 or later, and many of these works have been published since I began this thesis in 2012. As a number of studies appear in edited collections, this is indicative of the fact that medieval disability is being studied by a number of scholars, but that at the same time these specialised aspects of disability and impairment being addressed have not been developed into comprehensive, overarching studies or the subject of a single monograph. Metzler's recognition of the ambivalence attached to disability is borne out in studies across the whole temporal and geographical scope of the Middle Ages. As scholarship on disability in medieval studies is a relatively new area, what has been studied ranges from the Anglo-Saxon to the late-medieval period, and the Islamic world to Christianity.

The social history of disability is the most popular approach to examining the subject in the medieval period. Notable among such studies, the edited collection *Social Dimensions of Medieval Disease and Disability* was published in 2014. In this collection, Skevington's chapter on the semantics of Anglo Saxon disability is especially interesting in identifying the ambivalent meanings of disability and impairment that exist in Anglo-Saxon literature. Skevington's chapter presents evidence of the positive and negative significations of Constantia and her physical affliction in Ælfric's *Life of St. Agnes* and a Latin version of this episode, noting a contrast between desirable and undesirable sickness in Ælfric's *Life of Saints*. In the same edited collection, ambivalence is also the topic of Jeanne's chapter on lepers from the sixth to the fifteenth century. Jeanne, likewise, draws attention to the conflicting responses towards the afflicted body, exploring how leprosy has been represented as both a curse and a blessing throughout medieval history – a response that is relevant to my own thesis since it can also be found in medieval drama.

Scholarship has shown that the ideas of otherness and ambivalence stretch beyond Christian Europe. Kristina L. Richardson's book *Difference and Disability in*

the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies published in 2012, focuses on the 'otherness' of disability in what she refers to as a 'microhistory' of a network of six male Sunni scholars. This chain of scholars produced writings about bodies marked by 'blights' a category that included individuals 'who were cognitively and physically different, disabled and ill'.³¹ One of the most fascinating and relevant aspects of this work to my own research is the conflicting definition of impairment depending on the religious status of the body. For instance, Richardson notes that:

according to Islamic hagiographical writings, Muhammad possessed a raised disc of skin the size of a pigeon's egg between his shoulder blades ... but was described by early Muslim theologians as [a] ... mark of prophethood.³²

Thus, his body is '*perfectly* marked, as opposed to unblemished' concludes Richardson, as Mohammed is never described as being among the 'blighted'.³³ This study therefore provides further evidence of the ambiguous significations of disability and impairment. When combined with the findings of Skevington's study of Anglo-Saxon literature and Jeanne's exploration of leprosy, these studies provide evidence that the ambiguous signification of the disabled and impaired body is a phenomenon that is widespread throughout different cultures and different centuries.

The relationship between sin and disability and impairment is another principal area of recent research, and was highlighted in Metzler's seminal monograph of 2005. In *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe* from 2010, Newman-Stille's chapter examines moral and monstrous forms of disability in Gerard of Wales' *Topographica Hibernica*. In this text, Gerard views Ireland as a nation of the blind, lame, and maimed as well as werewolves, half-ox men and bearded women, which he blames on their barbarism, immorality and the

³¹ Kristina Richardson, *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 5.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³³ *Ibid.*

subsequent divine punishment of their sins.³⁴ This response to the Irish race is particularly interesting in the context of 'embodied difference' through racial identity in addition to the connection that Gerard of Wales makes between disability, impairment and sin. The examination of race and forms of embodied difference in connection with disability and impairment is another promising area that has been the focus of a handful of studies.

The examination of disability in medieval drama represents an area of neglected scholarly attention. Currently, studies in the field of medieval drama, where they engage at all with disability, predominately reflect on the representation of the impaired bodies of Christ, the saints and the martyrs. Whilst impairments and disabilities such as blindness in medieval drama have been examined in previous scholarship, these are narrow and brief studies that mainly concentrate on French drama. For instance, drama is a central focus in Carlson's monograph *Performing Bodies of Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics and Artists* from 2010, which explores torture, suffering and self-mutilation in late-medieval French saints' plays, as well as depictions of suffering in modern theatre performed in New York. However, Carlson herself acknowledges that the 'medieval scope' of this work is 'narrow', and it does not explore disability and impairment broadly.³⁵

In the field of medieval literature, Edward Wheatley's *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* from 2010 explores European attitudes towards blindness and the anti-Semitic trope of the blind Jew throughout medieval literature. This is a valuable study in its examination of the cultural construction of an individual disability and its contrasting and conflicting meaning over different bodies, cultures, races, and environments from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. However, whilst Wheatley's analysis of representations of blindness is revealing, its representation in drama is not a central focus of the work.

³⁴ Derek Newman-Stille, "Morality and Monstrous Disability in *Topographia Hibernica*", in: *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical and Religious Doctrines of the Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy Turner and Tory Pearman (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), p. 235.

³⁵ Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies of Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics and Artists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.8.

Overall, these examples highlight that recent research concerning the disabled or impaired body neglect medieval drama as a source of evidence.

Conclusion:

In my own thesis, drawing on the insights of previous studies, I will examine a range of historical sources in assessing the medieval medical, cultural and religious constructions of certain different forms of disability and impairment, and investigate the ambivalence of these conditions as well as their bearing on moral and spiritual identity. I will use these sources in order to explore the representations and responses to disability and impairment that are presented in medieval drama. Using information from the play-texts, stage directions, performance, costume and staging evidence, this thesis will present an analysis of the dramatic uses and significations of disability, impairment and embodied difference in the medieval period.

To date there has been no comprehensive study of the disabled or impaired body (in its many different manifestations) with medieval dramatic play-texts and performances as the main focus of the work. The areas I have chosen to examine in this thesis were led by what is available in drama to discuss comprehensively: old age, Jewishness, leprosy, and the wounded or dismembered body. These identities and afflictions cover natural disability and impairment; racial identity and embodied difference; disease and acquired deformity and impairment; and inflicted and self-inflicted impairment. Various other conditions are also discussed within my four chapters on these topics.

Ambivalence is a consistent theme in this thesis, acknowledging the changing and contrasting significations of disability, impairment and embodied difference according to the context. Thus, in presenting an analysis of the uses and significations of these conditions in medieval drama, this thesis provides an explanation of how they relate to their historical and cultural contexts, and explores how they can reflect the moral and spiritual condition of a character through the embodied mode of dramatic performance.

Chapter One

The Ageing Body:

Constructions, Representations and Signification

1) Introduction

The natural associations of older age with disability stem from the common ground that both states share as physiological deviations from the healthy body in medical and cultural thought. This stage of life was widely perceived as a time of gradual decline in physical and cognitive function and ability, and the humoral changes in old age were considered to affect temperament, causing vulnerabilities to anger, cruelty, and vices such as covetousness, sloth, and lechery. Yet, older age was also associated with positive qualities such as wisdom and experience during the medieval period.

Such responses to the physical and moral understanding of older age can be found in medieval poetry defining the different stages of man's life. In a poem from the De Lisle Psalter, the ageing process is associated with physiological decline.³⁶ Yet, the Old Man, who marks the first stage of mankind's later life, provides a positive image of his age, for he states: 'Enriched with worldly wisdom, I am influential in my judgements'.³⁷ In contrast, in the late-fourteenth-century poem 'zing and tender child I am', no positive qualities are attributed to mankind in later life. At the Old Man's stage of life he states: 'Myn eyn be dymmer þan þei wer; clere sight is gon away' and onwards from this stage, ageing is *only* associated with physiological decline.³⁸ These different approaches to defining the characteristics of older age provide evidence of its ambiguous cultural construction.

The condition of the older body in terms of its physical or psychological health or sickness, bodily ability or disability, could be interpreted as a signifier of its moral and spiritual condition, as it is in St. Jerome's approach to Paul of Concordia's

³⁶ The modern editor's title for this poem is "The Twelve Characteristics of the Human Condition".

³⁷ As cited in: Mary Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 92.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

healthy body in his old age.³⁹ In a letter to Paul of Concordia, St. Jerome interprets Paul's healthy, older body as the specific outcome of his virtuous existence:

And though we see such a healthy body given to many, even sinners, yet in their case the devil supplies it to them that they may sin, while in your case the Lord bestows it that you may rejoice.⁴⁰

Here, St. Jerome makes two interpretations of physical health in old age: that it is either the result of a virtuous life, or, the result of sin and the devil. Whilst a similar connection between infirmity, morality and spirituality has already been observed in Canon 22 of the Fourth Lateran Council, it is striking that St. Jerome's words specifically concern the moral signification of the body in older age. St. Jerome provides evidence of how the signification of the older body is variable.

As the ageing body is often used to reflect on a character's vices and virtues within medieval drama, this chapter will examine representations of the sinful and virtuous older body, to consider not just the physical aspects of age and the social attitudes towards it, but the moral, religious and spiritual meanings that are also attached to the ageing body in different contexts. This will enable us to explore the spectrum of signification of the older body in late-medieval drama.

In this chapter I argue that the physical, psychological and behavioural aspects of ageing are consistently used to signify the moral and spiritual condition of older characters in medieval drama. The same characteristics of ageing can therefore be used to signify the virtues or vices of a character, according to context.

The Ageing Body in Late-Medieval Thought

Defining Old Age:

It is essential to be aware of old age in terms of its late-medieval social construction, for although ageing is a natural life process, as Rosenthal points out, it is also a

³⁹ Although St. Jerome lived considerably earlier than the late-medieval period (340-420 AD), he was a celebrated and highly influential figure in medieval Christian tradition.

⁴⁰ As cited in: Josephine Cummins, "Attitudes to Old Age and Ageing in Medieval Society" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2000), p. 80.

complex 'web of behavioural patterns woven around a biological phenomenon'.⁴¹ Thus, medieval ideas about the ageing process and its effect upon the physical and psychological states of the body must be taken into account in order to understand how this identity was constructed.

A number of different medieval sources tend to assume that old age begins (or has already begun) by the age of sixty. In the *Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery's husband is described as 'a man in gret age passing thre scor yer' thus providing evidence that once he is over sixty he is considered to be of significant age.⁴² Similarly, in the *Castle of Perseverance*, a fifteenth-century play, the central protagonist Mankind associates the age of 'sexty wyntyr hold' with the decrepitude and humoral characteristics of ageing, since 'thi nose waxit cold' at this stage of life.⁴³ This supports the idea that sixty is definitive of older age. The same age is also found in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*, since January, a typical *senex amans* figure, is described to be 'sixty yeer'.⁴⁴ Overall, sixty conforms to ideas of ageing in medieval cultural thought, as its correspondence with schemata of the ages of man attests.

In the medieval period, ideas about the ageing process were most popularly expressed in a scheme of seven ages, although it was not uncommon for representations in literary and visual culture to depict more or less than seven stages in man's life. The Seven Ages of Man were widely recognised as consisting of Infancy (0-7); Childhood (7-14); Adolescence (14-21); Youth (21-28/35); Adulthood (28-48/50); Old Age (50-70); and Decrepitude (70+).⁴⁵ These ages can be used as a useful framework to understand the representations of the body in relation to age throughout medieval drama. It is striking that Old Age is defined as beginning around the age of fifty, rather than sixty. The fact that the age of fifty is incorporated into both Adulthood and Old Age suggests the ambiguity of determining the stage of

⁴¹ Joel T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 1.

⁴² Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book 1, Part 2, Chapter 73, ll. 4239-4240.

⁴³ *The Castle of Perseverance*, ed. David N. Klausner (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications: 2010), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/klausner-castle-of-perseverance>> l. 417, l. 418. All further references are to this edition.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Merchant's Tale*, in: *The Riverside Chaucer*, eds. Larry Benson and Fred Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), l. 1252, p. 154.

⁴⁵ "Ages of Man", in: *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, eds. André Vauchez, Barrie Dobson and Michael Lapidge (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 23.

man's life by the condition of the body at this age. Joannitius' medieval textbook of medicine, the *Isagoge*, also draws attention to the ambiguity at which chronological old age begins:

[maturity] is cold and dry ... the body begins to decline and decrease, although its power is not abated, and it lasts to the fiftieth or sixtieth year. After this comes old age.⁴⁶

This implies that the age of sixty, as the mid-point of Old Age in the Seven Ages of Man, is a definitive point of older age, with a clearer meaning about the physiological decline of the body than the age of fifty. Yet, as Joannitius also recognises, old age could begin (or appear to have begun) at fifty due to individual differences.

Another widely recognised structure representing the life and ages of mankind in the medieval period was the Wheel of Life. A depiction of ten ages of man's life can be found in the Wheel of the Ages of Man's Life from the De Lisle Psalter (see fig. 1). The text that corresponds to each age expresses its association with the state of the body in terms of either its gradual development or decline, from Infant, Boy, Adolescent, Young Man, Perfect-Aged Man, Old Man, Decrepit Man, Sick Man, Dying Man, and finally Dead Man.⁴⁷ Significantly, the eighth image in the wheel portrays the Sick Man in bed with a physician examining his urine, which links this stage of man's life with medieval medical ideas about the changes to the bodily humours with age. Thus, the Wheel of the Ages of Man's Life can be seen to attach chronological age to the medical and cultural constructions of ageing.

The life of man was also compared to the seasons, where the characteristics of each season were an analogy for a different stage of man's life. Spring represented childhood; summer denoted youth; autumn symbolised maturity; and winter was used as an analogy for advanced age and impending death.⁴⁸ This analogy is used in the fifteenth-century allegorical poem *The Mirror of the Periods of*

⁴⁶ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 9.

Man's Life, in which Mankind is described as being 'wyntir in age' in his later life.⁴⁹ Age is also symbolised by the seasons in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*. In this text, January's wintery name is symbolic of his older age, the decay of his body and his infertility, which are essential components of his *senex amans* characterisation.

The idea of the seasons of man's life was also linked to medieval medical ideas about the body. *De Mundi Celestis Terrestrisque Constitutione*, a twelfth-century treatise on the universe and soul attributed to Pseudo-Bede, describes the bodily humours by their associated season and age:

Blood corresponds to air, increases in spring and is dominant in *pueritia*. Choler corresponds to fire, increases in summer and is dominant in *adolescentia*. Melancholy corresponds to earth, increases in autumn and is dominant in *maturitas*. Phlegm corresponds to water, increases in winter and is dominant in *senectus*.⁵⁰

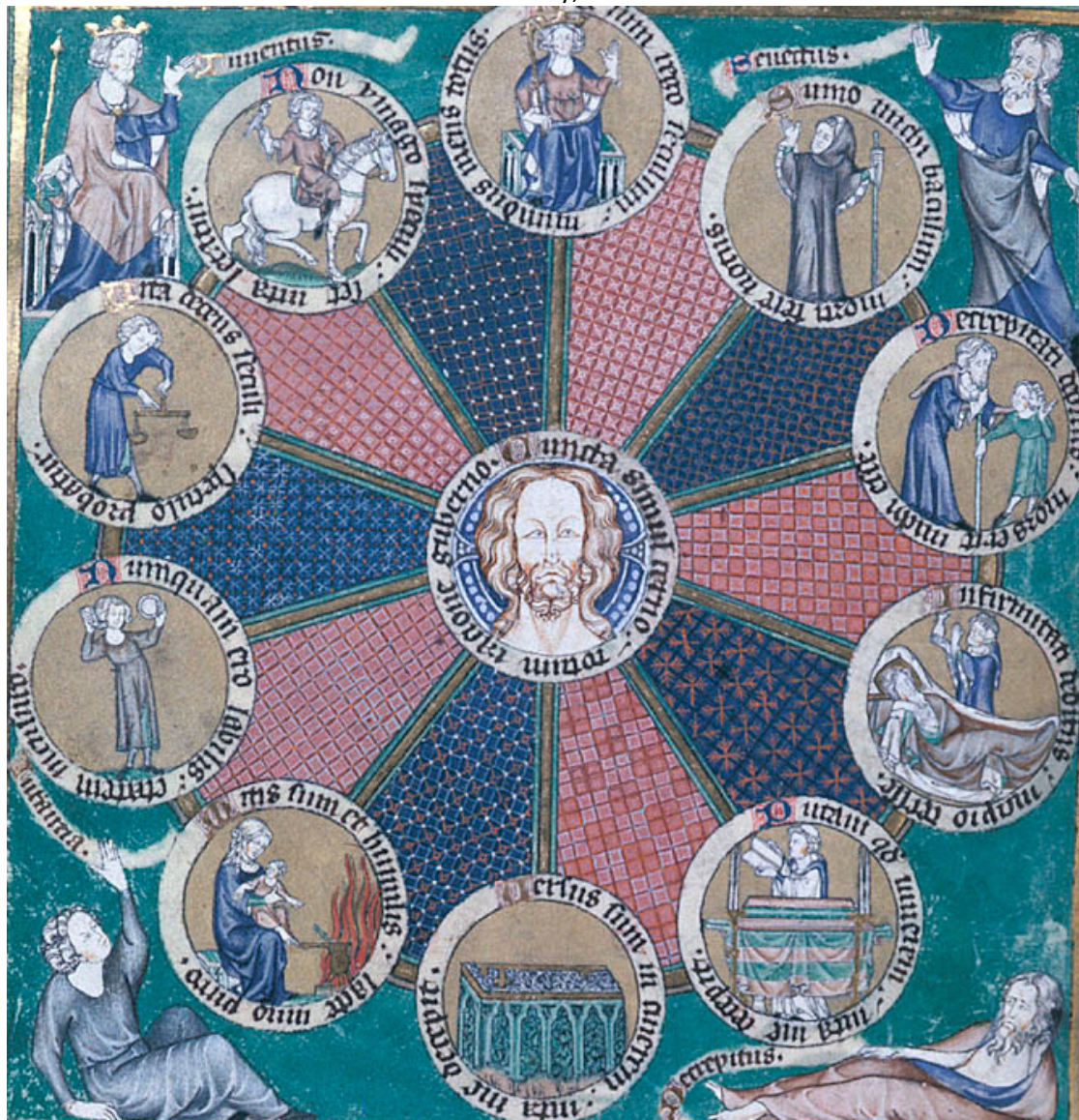
It is in the autumn of man's life that his composition is dominated by melancholy, and in the winter with phlegm. Melancholy and phlegm came to be associated with coldness and sluggishness to such an extent that by the late-medieval period melancholic and phlegmatic temperaments were no longer thought of as being distinct from each other.⁵¹ For this reason, the characteristics of melancholy and sloth came to be associated with older people.

⁴⁹ *The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life*, in: *Hymns to the Virgin & Christ, the Parliament of Devils, and other Religious Poems*, ed. Frederick James Furnivall. (1895; repr. London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1867), l. 114, p. 61.

⁵⁰ As cited in: Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life*, p. 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Figure 1: Wheel of the Ages of Man's Life
 14th Century, English (De Lisle Psalter, MS Arundel 83, Part II, f. 126v)
 British Library, London



Age in the Context of Disability, Impairment and Transgression:

The associations made between medieval ideas of the ages of man and particular physical, mental, behavioural and moral traits helps us to define how perceptions of chronological age fit into ideas about impairment. If each of the Seven Ages of Man is used as a point of reference, we can determine with which ages the decline of the body is associated, and the strengths, vulnerabilities, vices, and virtues of each age group individually. Over the Seven Ages of Man, infancy was thought to be a time of innocence and naivety; childhood a time of physical, personal, moral, and religious development; adolescence was considered a time of sexual awareness and inner

conflict over the paths of sexual temptation or moral righteousness; youth as a time of industry, parenthood and responsibility; adulthood of maturity; old age of moral vulnerability and physical decline; and decrepitude a time of cognitive impairment, resentment and anxiety for death.⁵² Therefore, the virtues and vices can be explicated according to chronological age, in addition to the physical understanding of the state and health of the body and the humoral characteristics of each age.

In the seasons of man's life, winter is not only symbolic of the increasing decrepitude of the body, but its coldness also reflects medieval medical thinking about the body in age and in sickness. For these reasons, as a cold planet, Saturn was a symbol of death, decay, disharmony, disability and older age in the medieval period. Bernardus Silvestris' twelfth-century humanist text the *Cosmographia* personifies Saturn as a cruel old man:

Saturn, [is] an old man everywhere condemned, savagely inclined to harsh and bloody acts of unfeeling and detestable malice ... Nature was horrified by the old man's cruelty.⁵³

This is typical of representations of Saturn, as can be seen in fig. 2, in which Saturn is portrayed as an older man requiring the assistance of crutch. This is indicative of the natural perception of older age as a state of increasing impairment. Notably, Saturn had many connections to culturally transgressive members of society in late-medieval thought including:

criminals, cripples, beggars, the elderly and low born, the poor and those involved in vulgar or dishonourable trades.⁵⁴

Socially transgressive people can also be seen in fig. 2, which depicts a number of figures below Saturn, some of which are disabled, with one in the stocks. These figures were perceived to be 'Saturn's children' – those born under the influence of the planet. A late-medieval poem in a German housebook describes the characteristics of these children:

⁵² "Ages of Man", in: *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, eds. Vauchez and Lapidge, p. 23.

⁵³ As cited in: Irven Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), p. 219.

⁵⁴ Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth Century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 214.

My children are vicious, dry and old,
Envious, weary, wretched, cold.
Deep eyes, hard skin, their beards are small.
They're lame, misshapen, depraved withal.
Traitorous, brooding, greedy, pale,
They often find themselves in jail.⁵⁵

In this poem, Saturn is quite broadly associated with different forms of disability, impairment and social transgression. Overall, the planet is representative not only of the physiological decline of older age but its morally and socially transgressive aspects, such as cruelty (as mentioned by Bernardus Silvestris), sinfulness, and avarice.

The use of mobility aids, such as walking sticks, is another way in which age is represented in the context of disability and impairment. Yet, whilst Saturn's older, impaired body evokes the negative associations with later life, the disabilities of old age could be portrayed without these significations. The use of mobility aids can be observed without stigma in schemata of the ages of man's life. In the six ages of man that are depicted in the stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral, for instance, the decrepitude and physical dependency of man in his later life is represented by his use of a walking stick (see fig. 3). The disabilities of old age were also portrayed in medieval manuscript images of virtuous biblical characters, as the image of Joseph in fig. 4 attests. This suggests that the signification of the physically dependent older body was variable and dependent on context.

⁵⁵ Timothy Husband, *The Medieval Housebook and the Art of Illustration* (New York: The Frick Collection, 1999), p. 19.

Figure 2: The Age of Saturn
15th Century, German (Block-Book) Gutenberg Museum, Mainz



Figure 3: The Six Ages of Man
13th Century, English (Stained Glass) Canterbury Cathedral, Kent



Figure 4: The Nativity
14th Century, English (MS Selden Supra 38, Part 1, f. 001v) Bodleian Library, Oxford



The Ageing Body in Medieval Medical Thought:

In medieval medicine, the balance of the four bodily humours was thought to define the constitution of the body, and character traits such as personality and temperament, could also be interpreted from its humoral composition. The vitality of the body was thought to come from its natural heat, a state associated with the healthy, youthful male, whereas the older body was perceived to be cold, indicating its unhealthy humoral composition. The *Isagoge* of Joannitius describes old age as:

abounding in phlegmatic humor, cold and wet, in which it is apparent that there is a decline of power, and it ends with the end of life.⁵⁶

Since colder humours were dominant in old age, older people were thought to be more susceptible to afflictions and diseases that numbed and paralysed their limbs.⁵⁷ Through this dominance of phlegm and black bile, old age was also associated with physical, moral and spiritual conditions associated with an excess of these humours. As noted previously, in works such as Hildegard of Bingen's *Causes and Cures*, an excess of melancholy was associated with the evil suggestion of the Devil and a lack of faith in God. In the 'Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum', a poem and medieval guide to health, melancholy is said to:

[make] men wicked, gloomy, and taciturn. These men ... work persistently toward a goal; they are insecure. They are envious, sad, avaricious, tight-fisted, capable of deceit, timid, and of muddy complexion.⁵⁸

Whilst these features of melancholy describe the general effects of an excess of black bile, it is significant that symptoms such as cruelty, envy, and covetousness have both medical and cultural associations with advanced age.

⁵⁶ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 143.

⁵⁷ Metzler, "Disability in Medieval Europe" p. 167.

⁵⁸ "Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum", in: *A Critical Edition of Le Regime Tresutile et Tresproufitable pour Conserver et Garder la Santé du Corps Humain*, ed. and trans. Patricia Willet Cummins (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies, 1976), <<http://www.godecookery.com/regimen/regimn14.htm>> p. 14.

Medieval Characteristics of Ageing:

Since medieval documentary and medical sources about ageing are particularly sparse, it is literary material that is considered by scholars to be the richest source in the study of historical gerontology.⁵⁹ However, the problem with using literary material to understand the normative interpretation of ageing is the artistic manipulation of the physical and mental ageing processes for its dramatic and rhetorical effects. Thus, examination of a range of both literary sources and historical records will provide a balanced and more representative response to the medieval cultural construction of ageing, allowing us to understand representations of ageing in medieval drama in context.

In Schemata:

In schemata such as the Seven Ages of Man, older age is represented as a time of physical and emotional changes such as declining physical mobility, moral vulnerability, and cognitive impairment. In the text accompanying the Wheel of the Ages of Man's Life in the De Lisle Psalter, as the Old Man transitions into Dead Man, he states:

Old Man: I take up my staff, almost acquainted with death.
Decrepit Man: Given over to decrepitude, death will be my condition.
Sick Man: Given over to sickness, I begin to fail.
Dying Man: I thought I should live forever; life has cheated me.
Dead Man: I have become dust and ashes, life has indeed cheated me.⁶⁰

In this text, the ageing process is characterised by its dependence on mobility aids, proximity to death, increased vulnerability to sickness, and resentment and bitterness with life. This can be compared with similar texts such as the fourteenth-century poem 'zing and tender child I am', where the later stages of life are once again characterised by physical decline and proximity to death:

Old Man: Myn eyn be dymmer þan þei wer; clere sight is gon away
Decrepit Man: On my cruche I lene me; I begyn to heeled.
Sick Man: Ded has me doun driven; þet makes my mykell elde.
Dying Man: Wele I wend to have lyved ay; lorn is my lyffe, my wyt.

⁵⁹ See: Rosenthal, *Old Age*, p. 176. See also: Cummins, "Attitudes to Old Age" p. 9.

⁶⁰ As cited in: Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life*, p. 80.

Dead Man: Fro erth I come to erth; I shall be closyd in a pyt.⁶¹

These perceptions of the ageing process are typical of late-medieval cultural thought. However, whilst many texts concern themselves with the negative aspects of ageing, positive representations of ageing also feature in some texts. In a thirteenth-century version of a Tree of Wisdom diagram from Paris, Old Age represents his stage as one of wisdom: 'This I believe to be the quality of old men, to plumb the full meanings' although Decrepitude states: 'The decrepit man is cast into doubt'.⁶² Here, Old Age and Decrepitude both portray themselves by their cognitive abilities. Old Age describes his wisdom as being the quality of his age, which is contrasted with Decrepitude cast into doubt due to his cognitive decline, a condition also associated with his age in sources such as the Seven Ages of Man. Yet, both Old Age and Decrepitude are represented as times of learning in the fifteenth-century Tree of Wisdom depicted in fig. 5, in which the seven ages of man each correspond to one of the seven liberal arts: grammar to infancy; logic to childhood; rhetoric to adolescence; music to youth; geometry to adulthood; arithmetic to old age; and astronomy to decrepitude. The tree is designed to chart the acquisition of man's wisdom as he progresses through the seven liberal arts over his lifetime. Thus, medieval schemata represent old age inconsistently, as a potential time of wisdom and continued learning, as well as a time of cognitive decline.

In Medieval Literature:

Literature specifically concerning the ages of man's life is an essential resource in offering cultural perspectives on ageing. In its personified representations of Youthe, Medill Elde and Elde, the fourteenth-century poem *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* offers a valuable insight into the stereotypical physical and moral associations with ageing. In this poem, the characteristics of Elde's advanced age include an arched back and white beard, typical attributes of old age. Elde is also:

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁶² Sears, *The Ages of Man*, p. 143.

ballede and blynde and alle babirlippede,
Totheles and tenefull.⁶³

He also seems to appear as if he is: 'a hundrethe yeris of age'.⁶⁴ *The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life* is a similar allegorical poem that represents the ageing of mankind, over the course of the battle for his soul between the forces of good and evil. In this text, when Mankind is 'wyntir in age'⁶⁵ he suffers from visual and hearing impairments and has an arched back, in contrast to his younger years when he possessed 'strengþe, bewte, & heele'.⁶⁶ In Mankind's later life the personified abstraction Lechery endeavours to tempt him with sex by arguing that sexual abstinence could pose risks for him:

Quod leccherie to man, "loue þanne weel me,
þi lustis with wommen þou fulfille,
For if þou in zouþe sparist þanne þee,
þou maist falle in greet perille."⁶⁷

The sin of lechery in older age was considered to be unnatural and morally objectionable, as is evident from Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* in which the philosopher teaches: 'lechery is vile in every case, but in no case is it so vile as in old people'.⁶⁸ Thus, older age was perceived in terms of its moral vulnerabilities and greater capacity for deviance.

The ageing body could signify its moral and spiritual condition in a number of different ways. Cummins notes how the deterioration of the body through age could be 'a convenient analogy for the corruption brought about by sin' which highlights the cultural associations made between sinfulness and the older body.⁶⁹ The ageing body might also be perceived to signify sin through physical features such as an

⁶³ *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, in *Wynner and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, ed. Warren Ginsburg (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/ginsburg-parlement-of-the-thre-ages>> ll. 158-159.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 164.

⁶⁵ *The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life*, ed. Furnival, l. 114, p. 61.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 435, p. 71.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 225-228, p. 65.

⁶⁸ As cited in: John A. Burrow, "The Portrayal of Amans in *Confessio Amantis*", in: *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), p. 15.

⁶⁹ Cummins, "Attitudes to Old Age" p. 4.

arched back, which was thought to represent the 'burden of sin'.⁷⁰ Literary sources are particularly valuable in representing the range of sins and vices with which older age was associated. Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*, for instance, connects boasting, lying, anger and covetousness to this stage of life:

Foure gleedes han we whiche I shal devyse, -
Avauntyng, liyng, anger, coveitise;
Thise four sparkle longen unto eelde.
Oure olde lemes mowe wel been unweelde,
But wyl ne shal nat failen, that is sooth.⁷¹

The ageing body became increasingly associated with the sin of avarice (or covetousness) in the medieval period. Evidence of this association can be found elsewhere in the works of Chaucer, as Criseyde describes how 'elde is ful of coveytise' in *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁷²

In all of these representations of ageing, the declining condition of the body receives a significant amount of attention. These details of the ageing process are consistently used in order to signify and parallel the moral condition of the protagonists. There are a number of poems, such as 'An Old Man's Prayer' from the fourteenth century, which use the older man as a repentant sinner close to death.⁷³ In the thirteenth-century 'Poema Morale', the function of the old man is not just to reflect on his personal sinfulness over his own lifetime of mistakes, but to actively encourage others to do penance for theirs. The old man is worried that his repentance comes too late for his redemption, thus portraying older age as a time of anxiety for death, for he notes that it is 'Wel late ich habbe me bithocht'⁷⁴ as he reflects on the sins of his past:

Fole yunge dede i-don
The me ofthincheth nuthe.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Reeve's Tale*, in: *The Riverside Chaucer*, eds. Larry Benson and Fred Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 3883-3887, pp. 77-78.

⁷² Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in: *The Riverside Chaucer*, eds. Larry Benson and Fred Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), l. 1369, p. 555.

⁷³ The "Poema Morale" from the twelfth century and the thirteenth century "Le Regret de Maximian" are two further examples.

⁷⁴ "Poema Morale", in: *Middle English Literature*, eds. C. Dunn and E. Byrnes (New York: Routledge, 1990), l. 15, p. 47.

Mest al thet me likede er
Nu hit me misliketh.⁷⁵

Although the old man describes his youth as a period of sinfulness, he puts these regrets into the context of his age:

Elde is me bistolen on
Er Ich hit wiste.⁷⁶

However, whilst in the 'Poema Morale' the old man is concerned that his repentance comes too late for his redemption, there is relief in the hope of salvation, as can also be seen in texts such as 'An Old Man's Prayer', which fulfils an act of penance. Thus, in addition to its moral decay the older body could convey a state not yet beyond redemption, but with an urgent need for repentance in its proximity to death. This multivalent signification of age is highlighted further by Patterson's description of the old man in the 'Poema Morale':

age is at once a symbol of sinfulness, the sin itself, and ... a cheerless decay that stands as nature's mocking parody of the spiritual change that will now never be achieved.⁷⁷

Yet, even in these negative representations of the ageing process, that older age is considered a time of contrition is, on some levels, a positive response to this time of life. The suffering of the older body in its deterioration is used as a symbol of moral decay but becomes a symbol of atonement and penance. Overall, this is indicative of the changing and variable significations of the older body.

In Historical Accounts:

Documents that relate to the withdrawal of men from their working lives, either through retirement or age-related exemption from public service, can also provide us with primary evidence of how the ageing process was thought to impact on the ability to fulfil duties. Rosenthal's examination of the *Calendars of Letters*, a number of documents of the government of the City of London from the late thirteenth

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 19-22.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 29-30.

⁷⁷ Lee W. Patterson, "Chaucerian Confession: Penitential Literature and the Pardoner", *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976): p. 155.

century through to the early sixteenth, reveals that:

Men of 70 and more were allowed to escape from duty on municipal juries simply by virtue of their age; many more were excused when they argued some compelling combination of ailments and disabilities in lieu of or in addition to age.⁷⁸

This regulated response to the ageing body defined seventy as an age at which a citizen of London was deemed either physically or cognitively no longer capable to serve, or likely to be close to such a decline due to age. The age of seventy is also a noteworthy cut-off point since it marks the end of Old Age and the beginning of Decrepitude according to the Seven Ages of Man's life, a time associated with cognitive decline.

Influential Latin texts that reflect upon advanced age are another useful source of information that can provide primary evidence of perceptions of the ageing process. In the late twelfth century Cardinal Lotario dei Segni⁷⁹ wrote *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, with the chapter 'On the Discomforts of Old Age' specifically concerning the declining physiology, temperament and vices of later life. In this text, the Cardinal observes:

if anyone does reach old age, his heart weakens ... his face is wrinkled and his back bent, his eyes grow dim and his joints weak, his nose runs ... An old man is easily provoked and hard to calm down. He will believe everything and question nothing. He is stingy and greedy, gloomy, querulous, quick to speak, slow to listen, though by no means slow to anger.⁸⁰

Like the representations of ageing in medieval schemata and literary sources, the Cardinal portrays old age as a time of physiological and cognitive decline and highlights the tendencies of older men to be covetous and avaricious. His emphasis on the anger of age supports the same association made in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*. The Cardinal also asserts that these changes will happen to all of us:

⁷⁸ Rosenthal, *Old Age*, p. 106.

⁷⁹ The future Pope Innocent III.

⁸⁰ Cardinal Lotario dei Segni, *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, ed. D. Howard, trans. M. Dietz (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), Book One, Chapter X, p. 13.

the old cannot glory over the young any more than the young can scorn the old. For we are now what they once were; and some day will be what they are now.⁸¹

Here, Cardinal dei Segni portrays old age as an important time of repentance due to its physical and spiritual weaknesses and its increased vulnerability to sin. This stage of life is used to inspire repentance due to its proximity to death.

Cicero's *De Senectute*, which was influential during the Middle Ages, reveals a more positive social response to the ageing body and the purposes of existence in later life. In this text, Cato the Elder explains the advantages of age to the young characters. As he makes reference to the typical, negative associations of old age, he specifically defends the value of this time of life for people that have lived up to a behavioural standard:

those who have led their lives with moderation, and discretion, without peevishness, and ill nature, never complain, that Old Age is insupportable.⁸²

Cato also represents the advantages of old age as a valuable time of wisdom, experience and virtue:

The best arms ... for the defence and security of Old Age, are Learning and a constant perseverance in a virtuous course; which, if cultivated, and improved to the best advantage, in every condition of life, will be of singular use to us in our latter days ... because the consciousness of a well spent life, and the reflection upon having done many great and glorious actions, is the sweetest of all enjoyments.⁸³

This positive association of old age as a time of virtue is a reversal of the idea of this stage of life as a time of increased moral vulnerability. This is comparable to St. Jerome's approach to Paul of Concordia since his positive response to the health of his friend's body in its older age was due to his perception of the exemplary life that he had lived. Whilst Cicero and St. Jerome both provide examples of the potential

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Cicero, *Cicero on Old Age: A Dialogue*, ed. and trans. S. Hemming, (Oxford: Unknown Publisher, 1716), <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DVcAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Cicero+on+Old+Age,+a+Dialogue,+Volume+2&hl=en&sa=X&ei=f7ZdVd_NKeXI7gbB1IPoDA&ved=0CCEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false> p. 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

positive significations of the older body, in both cases it is dependent upon having lived a virtuous life.

Other influential sources such as Giles of Rome's thirteenth-century political treatise *De Regimine Principum* also provide a useful insight into the valued aspects of older age. In this treatise, which was created at the request of King Philip III of France, old age could be associated with authority, manners and good counsel:

no differens is bytwene a child of zong age and one with maneres of zong age, for on þat vseth soche likyng. For thei he be olde of tyme and of age, for a is a child in maneres, he [is] vnworthi to be a prince.⁸⁴

As Dunlop explains, in the rhetoric of counsel, old age comes to be associated with good counsel not only because of perceptions of its greater wisdom and experience, but also because it was thought that older men 'are no longer controlled by passions and so are free to exercise reason'.⁸⁵ While this positive response to the wisdom of age is consistent with perceptions of Old Age in the Tree of Wisdom schema, the idea that older age is a period absent of any vulnerability to 'passions' is inconsistent with other widespread cultural associations of older people as being susceptible to anger, motivated by covetousness, and morally vulnerable in general.

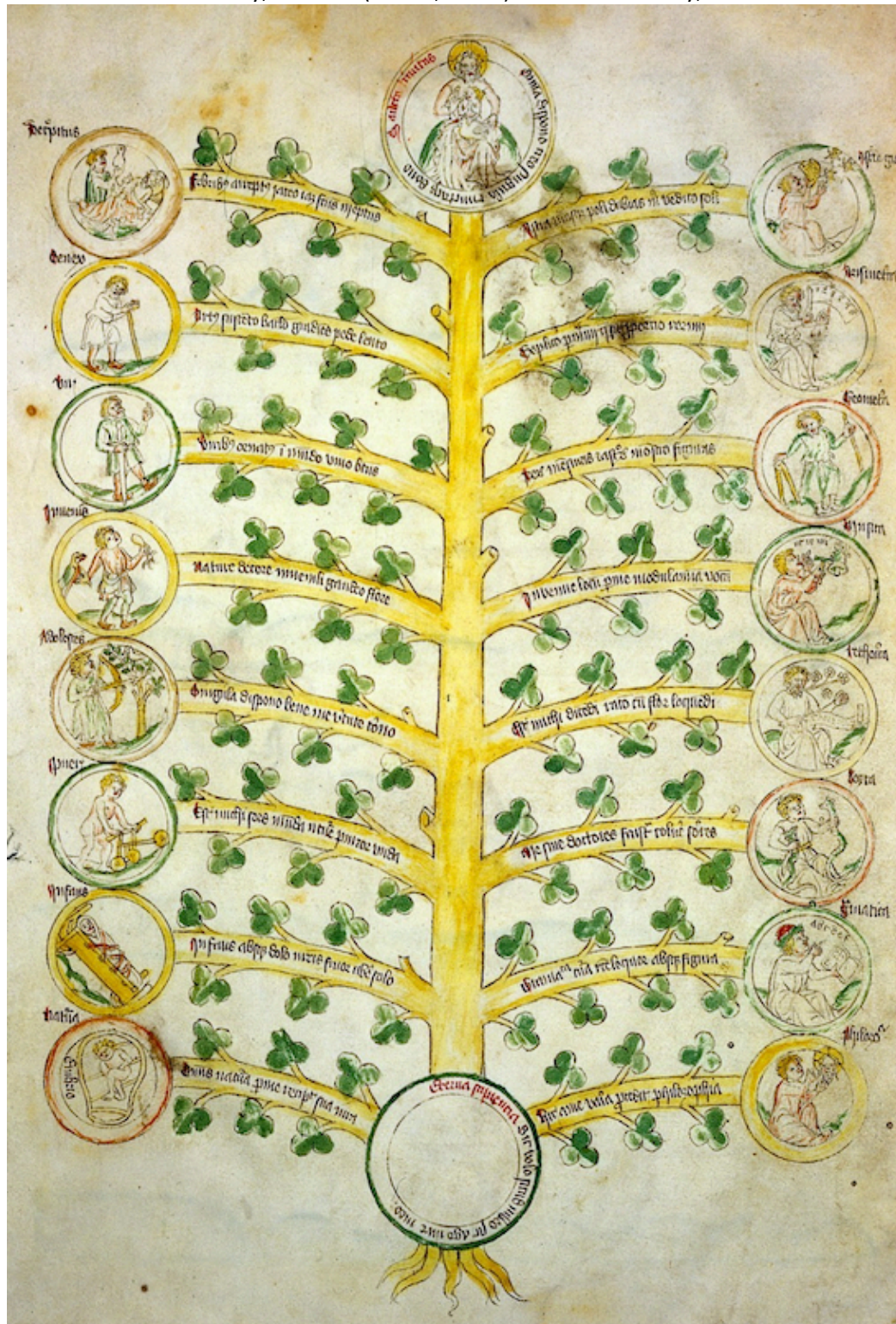
These positive and negative constructions, representations and significations of old age in medieval schemata, literary culture and historical accounts, are significant cultural sources to draw upon in order to understand the significations of ageing in medieval drama. Even though we see a number of different positive constructions of the authority, wisdom, virtue and purpose of old age applied to devout Christian characters in medieval drama, negative aspects of ageing are also applied to these same characters. The negative aspects of ageing (such as physical and cognitive age-related impairment and changes to temperament) seem to have a more variable and positive signification when applied to a devout Christian character, but a negative signification for characters that are represented to be

⁸⁴ Giles of Rome, *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa's Middle English Translation of the De Regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus*, eds. D. Fowler, C. Briggs, and P. Remley (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), Book 1, Part 1, ll. 7-10, p. 18.

⁸⁵ Fiona Dunlop, *The Late Medieval Interlude: The Drama of Youth and Aristocratic Masculinity* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2007), p. 50.

spiritually impaired or morally fallible. Various aspects of these ambivalent cultural constructions of ageing are used to very different effect within the corpus of medieval drama, according to the context, as I shall now go on to explore.

Figure 5: The Tree of Wisdom
15th Century, German (MS 49, f. 69v) Wellcome Library, London



2) Plays

There are a number of older characters in medieval drama. Morality plays and interludes such as *Mundus et Infans*, *Everyman*, and the *Castle of Perseverance* are typically concerned with the moral vulnerability of old age in the context of their focus on individual salvation. For this reason, the ageing process is often represented through or in conjunction with allegorical characters. In *Mundus et Infans*, for example, the characters Infans, Manhood, and Age are used to depict the ageing process at specific stages of man's life. In comparison, the character Everyman from *Everyman* is depicted in the brief time leading up to his death, although no specific age is ever applied to him. In the fifteenth-century morality the *Castle of Perseverance*, the central protagonist Mankind conforms to physiological and moral associations of ageing and of older age specifically, once he reaches the age of sixty. In this play, allegorical characters including sins and virtues surround Mankind at different periods of moral and spiritual strength or vulnerability. Since chronological age is referred to in this play, this provides an opportunity to explore how Mankind's moral and spiritual qualities fare with age, and how they are reflected through his age-related impairments. *The Castle of Perseverance* is therefore the first play examined in this chapter, under the category of the sinful ageing body.

Biblical drama is also a valuable source in the endeavour to explore how the ageing body is constructed, represented and responded to, since a wide range of older characters feature in the plays, providing us with a detailed insight into the ageing body over a moral spectrum. Biblical plays are more likely to focus positively on old age as a characteristic of Christian patriarchs, using it to support or lend credibility to biblical events. Since different collections of play-texts such as the *N-Town Plays*, the *Towneley Plays*, the *York Corpus Christi Plays*, the *Chester Cycle*, and the Cornish *Ordinalia* each portray similar biblical episodes using the same characters, biblical drama can be used to compare how ageing is applied to these characters over texts of various authorship.⁸⁶

Characters in Old Testament episodes reach a considerable old age. Abraham is over one-hundred years old in the York *Abraham and Isaac* (whereas the N-Town

⁸⁶ Henceforth: N-Town, Towneley, York, Chester and Cornwall.

Abraham and Isaac only defines his age by his characteristics of ageing). Noah's chronological age is inconsistent: initially five-hundred years old in the N-Town *Noah*, he is six-hundred by the end of the play. In other plays, characters may simply refer to the physiological effects of their older age, as we see with the barrenness of Joachim and Anne (in the N-Town *Joachim and Anne*), of Elizabeth (in the N-Town *Visit to Elizabeth*), or the impotence of Joseph (in the N-Town play of *Joseph's Doubt* among others). Simeon is also portrayed as an older man in both the York and Towneley *Purification* plays, although no specific age is defined for the character, nor is there any evidence from the gospels that the character is in his later life.

In my second section on the devout ageing body, I examine a range of biblical characters over a number of different plays. I start with Simeon in the Towneley *Purification of Mary* and the York *Purification of the Virgin*, and compare the tropes of ageing that are used in both of these plays. Since Simeon is not an old man in the gospels, it is valuable to explore how medieval representations of his declining physiological condition are used specifically to reflect on his moral and spiritual qualities. I then move on to Joseph, who I examine in the N-Town plays of the *Marriage of Mary and Joseph* and *Joseph's Doubt*, the York play of *Joseph's Troubles About Mary*, the Chester *Wrightes' Play*, and the Coventry Corpus Christi *Purification*. As with Simeon, Joseph is also portrayed as an older man in medieval sources, making him a vital figure to discuss. Over these plays, in addition to impotence, Joseph is characterised with physical and cognitive decline, anxiety, irritability, and deceitfulness. This means that both physiological and temperamental features of ageing can be examined and explored in relation to Joseph's virtuous old age. Overall, my focus on the sinful ageing body and the devout ageing body not only provides insight into how these distinct moral and spiritual states are signified through forms of disability and impairment, but how morality plays and biblical drama use the ageing process to different effect.

The Sinful Ageing Body

The Castle of Perseverance:

The Castle of Perseverance [CoP] is a play-text thought to have been composed in East Anglia in the mid-fifteenth century, which dramatises the conflict between good and evil forces for the soul of Mankind.⁸⁷ The play traces the life of Mankind, and uses allegorical characters that respond to Mankind's body on physical, moral, spiritual and psychological levels as he ages. As these abstractions, archetypal good and evil forces, attempt to either preserve or tempt Mankind into sin, they reveal much about late-medieval cultural thought on the older body in later life in terms of its moral and spiritual strengths and weaknesses.

The Castle of Perseverance contains a valuable insight into older age and its proximity to death because it opens before the birth of its central protagonist Mankind and concludes with his posthumous redemption. As a play in which Mankind is tested morally and spiritually throughout his life, we can examine the physical descriptions of the ageing body in the context of chronological age as well as how his moral and spiritual qualities fare with age.

The Physiological Characteristics of Ageing:

Descriptions of the physical effects of the ageing process feature throughout the *Castle of Perseverance*. After the World, Belial, Flesh, and Mankind, identify and represent their characters at the beginning of the play, at line 327 the Good Angel and the Bad Angel begin to interact and the battle between good and evil forces for the soul of Mankind commences. It is at this early stage, as the Good Angel and the Bad Angel each attempt to convince Mankind to live either a virtuous or a sinful life, that the Bad Angel specifically marks out the physically decrepit stage of older age as being the time for Mankind to live virtuously:

Tyl thou be sexty wyntyr hold.
Wanne thi nose waxit cold,
Thanne mayst thou drawe to goode
(CoP, ll. 417-419).

⁸⁷ The edition is identified in footnote 43.

The Bad Angel draws on cultural responses to virtuous and penitent older age in order to argue that it is morally inconsequential for Mankind to sin at his current stage of life because he will have time to repent and redeem himself in his later life. Yet, the Bad Angel's words are insincere – this is merely an excuse to delay a virtuous existence and, most importantly, to continue to sin. The specific reference to the age of sixty is also significant: much later in the play, after Mankind has led a sinful existence, he reflects on his own bodily decrepitude at this age:

I gynne to waxyn hory and olde.
My bake gynnyth to bowe and bende,
I crulle and crepe and wax al colde.
Age makyth man ful unthende,
Body and bonys and al unwolde;
My bonys are febyl and sore.
I am arayed in a sloppe,
As a yonge man I may not hoppe,
My nose is colde and gynnyth to droppe,
Myn her waxit al hore
(*CoP*, ll. 2482-2491).

At the age of sixty, Mankind's representation of himself in his older age is particularly focussed on his physiological decline and he provides detailed examples of the discomfort and frailty that he is afflicted with. The ageing process has changed the appearance and structure of his body since his back 'gynnyth to bowe and bende' (*CoP*, l. 2483) and his mobility has been affected since he now has to 'crulle and crepe' (*CoP*, l. 2484). These specific details about the structure, posture and movement of Mankind's body provides us with evidence of how his older age could have been physically performed. Changes to his physical appearance also feature in his observation that 'Myn har waxit al hore' (*CoP*, l. 2491), which in addition to his arched back and declining mobility are typical features of older age. Mankind's complaint that his 'bonys are febyl and sore' (*CoP*, l. 2487) also suggests the suffering that his character is experiencing. This provides evidence that even the pain of age-related impairment is dramatised in the performance of the ageing body.

The description of Mankind's nose as 'colde and gynnyth to droppe' (*CoP*, l. 2490) is an important symptom, as it parallels the Bad Angel's earlier description of

older age as 'Wanne thi nose waxit cold' (*CoP*, l. 418). As the Bad Angel has already associated these physical characteristics of ageing as being the time to 'drawe to goode' (*CoP*, l. 418), Mankind's older body is used to signify his sinfulness as well as his increasingly final chances for repentance. In addition, the dripping nose has connotations of the ill health of the body and suggests the diminishing control over the body with age. This characteristic can be found in historical sources such as *On the Misery of the Human Condition*: 'if anyone does reach old age ... his nose runs'.⁸⁸ Mankind not only refers to his nose as 'colde' (*CoP*, l. 2490), but also describes how his entire body 'wax al colde' (*CoP*, l. 2484). As the older body's vulnerability to sickness and ill health was particularly associated with its cold humoral condition, this shows the influence of the medical construction of ageing upon its dramatic representations. Mankind's vulnerability to sickness and the diminishing control over his body is another way in which his spiritual and moral vulnerabilities are suggested, again due to the parallel between his physical and moral decline. The cold condition of Mankind's body is symbolic considering Saturn's associations with old age, disability and moral transgression. Thus, the effects of the ageing process possess negative significations. Since these symptoms have already featured in the words of the Bad Angel, tempting Mankind to continue to sin, his advanced age reflects his moral decline and vulnerability.

In his description of the physical decline of old age, Mankind also reflects that: 'Age makyth man ful unthende' (*CoP*, l. 2485). Here, the use of the 'unthende' is particularly interesting for its varied interpretations including: 'not bringing about health', 'small', 'weak', 'humble', 'unprofitable', and 'unwholesome'.⁸⁹ Whilst many of these interpretations are suggestive of the physical ailments of advanced age, it is noteworthy that 'humble', 'unprofitable', and 'unwholesome' can each reflect on the morality of older age. The interpretation that age makes man 'unprofitable' is especially important in the context of Avarice, who is not only the allegorical character to whom Mankind addresses this line, but a sin to which old age was considered particularly vulnerable. Similarly, the interpretation of 'unwholesome' is

⁸⁸ Cardinal Lotario dei Segni, *On the Misery*, Book One, Chapter X, p. 13.

⁸⁹ "unthende", in: *Middle English Dictionary: Part U.3*, eds. H. Kurath, S. McAllister Kuhn, and R. Lewis (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 345.

significant in terms of the many cultural associations of older age and sinfulness. The conflicting meanings and connotations of Mankind's use of 'unthende' may have been employed in order to suggest the moral ambiguity of Mankind's character in his old age. This, in turn, is suggestive of the morally ambiguous signification of the older body due to its liminal state between life and death, and therefore temptation and redemption.

Cognitive impairment is another characteristic of old age that is employed within the play: the Second Standard-Bearer speaks of how the Bad Angel entices Mankind by deceiving him with tricks 'to hys laste ende' (*CoP*, l. 98), causing man on earth to become 'maskeryd' (confused) 'in mynde' (*CoP*, l. 101). This characteristic, which conforms to schemata of the ages of man, provides evidence of the association between old age and a lack of mental clarity. At the same time, Mankind's impaired cognitive functions also reflect on man's inability to understand the consequences of the sinful life. It is only in Mankind's *repentant* old age the character is finally able to recognise how in his *sinful* old age:

I was ful wod
That I forsoke myn Aungyl Good
(*CoP*, ll. 3069-3070).

Here, Mankind indicates that his 'madness' in forsaking the Good Angel has been overcome – an aspect of the older body that is rendered obsolete in his new spiritual clarity, which is specifically used to reverse this previous symbolism. This transformation in the signification of Mankind's older body demonstrates how the moral and spiritual connotations of ageing vary by context, even when the body remains the same.

The Spiritual Characteristics of Ageing:

Specific cultural ideas about the spiritual weakness of man over the ageing process can be found in the *Castle of Perseverance*. In a discussion of Mankind's spiritual weakness between World, Pleasure, Folly and the Bad Angel, the Bad Angel implies that Mankind is susceptible to sinfulness over his whole life as he claims: 'syn he was

born I have hym blent' (*CoP*, ll. 530-531). Whilst this suggests that Mankind is vulnerable to sin across his life, it also marks out youth as a specific stage of life that easily succumbs to the temptations of sin.

Notably, the sins of Mankind's youth, such as Pleasure, Flesh and Folly, are different from the sins that try to tempt Mankind in his older age. Whereas in his youth, Pleasure describes how: 'Of lust and folye he hath no shame' (*CoP*, l. 578), the allegorical character plays no part in his old age. Similarly, Folly, who is specifically described by Pleasure as being 'yonge Foly' (*CoP*, l. 520), features very little in the play after Mankind's youth. After Pleasure ceases to tempt Mankind, different sins, Gluttony, Lechery and Sloth, then endeavour to entice him.

Youth and older age are both portrayed as specific ages of moral vulnerability in the *Castle of Perseverance*, whereas at the age of forty Mankind has the strength to repent the sins of his youth, for which he temporarily gains the protection of the Castle. Significantly, in schemata of the ages of man's life, this stage of Mankind's life is equivalent to Perfect Age. The Wheel of the Ages of Man's Life shows Perfect Age as the stage between the Young Man and the Old Man. In the Seven Ages of Man's Life, Adulthood (28-48/50) was considered to be a time of physical and emotional maturity. Thus, as Mankind's body would be at its physical peak and maturity at the age of forty, the moral strengths that he demonstrates at this age correspond with his prime physiological condition. This provides further evidence of the way in which Mankind's body is used to signify his moral and spiritual strengths and weaknesses.

Mankind is described as being of Perfect Age by the Bad Angel, who tries to dissuade him from entering the Castle by telling him that at 'forty wyntyre olde' (*CoP*, l. 1575) he should continue to indulge in the sins of Pleasure and the Flesh and 'pleye thee a while wyth Sare and Sysse' (*CoP*, l. 1573). In his endeavour to encourage Mankind to continue to indulge in the sins of his youth, the Bad Angel once again claims that old age is the time to repent:

Late men that arn on the pyttys brynke
Forbryn bothe mete and drynke
And do penaunce as hem good thynke
(*CoP*, ll. 1581-1583).

Here, the Bad Angel represents old age and its proximity to death as being the time for penance, in order to argue that sinning is still inconsequential to Mankind in his current stage of life. It is in highlighting that Mankind is at his physical prime that the Bad Angel attempts to entice him with 'Sare and Sysse' (*CoP*, l. 1573), to convey that he is still able to enjoy these sins. This temptation is contrasted with the forbearance of 'mete and drynke' (*CoP*, l. 1582) in older age, which promotes the pleasures of the flesh rather than penitential fasting.

As the Castle is symbolic of Mankind's moral strength in his Perfect Age, it is significant that there is an absence of any language that describes his body as either physically or morally vulnerable at this age. This is in stark contrast to the descriptions of Mankind's vulnerable body in youth and later life. For instance, in the banns, the Second Standard-Bearer emphasises the vulnerability of both of these stages of life:

Whou Mankynde into this werld born is ful bare
And bare schal beryed be at hys last ende
(*CoP*, ll. 16-17).

In turn, this is in contrast to descriptions of the Castle as being 'strenger thanne any in Fraunce' (*CoP*, l. 1553), which uses the Castle as a metaphor for Mankind's moral and spiritual defence from sin. Although Mankind does not succumb to temptation in his Perfect Age, the sins still interact with him across the expanse of his life as they endeavour to entice him out of the Castle. This highlights that man is always aware of his potential to commit sinful acts, even when he is least vulnerable to temptation.

It is at the age of sixty that Avarice succeeds in enticing Mankind out of the Castle, suggesting that the older body is lacking in the physical and moral strength of Perfect Age, and therefore becomes vulnerable to the temptations of a sinful life:

I forsake the Castel of Perseveraunce.
In Coveytyse I wyl me hyle
For to gete sum sustynaunce
(*CoP*, ll. 2534-2536).

It is noteworthy that he is enticed from the Castle by the sin of Avarice, rather than the sinful abstractions from his youth (Pleasure, Flesh, and Folly), as this provides insight into the moral and spiritual characteristics of ageing through the age-dependant vulnerabilities to sin. Whilst Avarice is a consistent temptation to Mankind across his life, the means of enticing him into sinfulness are different in his older age. Whereas in his youth, the Bad Angel attempts to corrupt him with the greed and luxury of 'gold and sylvyr and ryche rent' (*CoP*, l. 391) and Avarice uses the lure of 'ryche aray' (*CoP*, l. 831), his greedy temptations in his later life are to selfishly hoard his wealth. For instance, Mankind speaks of his desire to 'hyde this gold undyr the grownde' (*CoP*, l. 2742) and 'Let no pore man therof have' (*CoP*, l. 2376). The sinfulness of covetousness in old age is not simply greed for the luxuries that wealth can afford, but the corruption of hoarding money for its own sake.

The popular association of older age with avarice or covetousness is consistent throughout the *Castle of Perseverance*. As early as the banns of the play, the Second Standard-Bearer specifically associates covetousness with ageing, for he observes:

Hard a man is in age and covetouse be kynde.
Whanne all othyr synnys Man hath forsake,
Evere the more that he hath the more is in hys mynde
(*CoP*, ll. 92-94).

Covetousness is portrayed as increasingly corrupting and damaging to the life of Mankind. After his death, as Truth evaluates his sinful past, Mankind's indulgence of this sin is compared to a gradual death: 'The more he hadde, the more he cravyd, / Whyl the lyf lefte hym wythinne' (*CoP*, ll. 3266-7). The decay of life through covetousness parallels its corruption of the soul as well as the physiological effects of ageing through its increasing proximity to death. This corruption of the soul through covetousness affects his moral awareness and concern for his salvation when mankind 'caryth more for hys catel thanne for hys cursyd synne' (*CoP*, l. 106).

Although the sin of covetousness implies greed and moral corruption, the First Standard-Bearer understands the natural fears of the poverty and insecurity of age as a factor that exacerbates vulnerability to this sin:

Owt of Good Perseveraunce whanne Mankynde wyl not come,
Yyt the Badde Aungyl wyth Coveytyse hym gan asayle,
Fyndende hym in poverté and penaunce so benome,
And bryngyth hym in beleve in defaute for to fayle
(*CoP*, ll. 79-82).

Avarice tries to exploit these very anxieties in order to entice Mankind to be as covetous as possible while he still can, advising:

be coveytous whylys thou may thee welde.
If thou be pore and nedy in elde
Thou schalt oftyn evyl fare
(*CoP*, ll. 2528-2530).

Here, Avarice targets the physical dependency of the older body in order to exploit his weaknesses to covetousness through the financial insecurities of later life. The physical impairments of advanced age are therefore used again to reflect on the soul's vulnerability to corruption.

Another of Mankind's anxieties concerning his wealth in his older age is that: 'Man knowe not who schal be hys eyr and governe hys good' (*CoP*, l. 105). In the banns of the play, the First Standard-Bearer represents this as a general human fear, which foreshadows Mankind's later concerns for his wealth after death that:

ther schal com a lythyr ladde wyth a torne hod,
I-Wot-Nevere-Who schal be hys name, hys clothis be ful thynne,
Schal eryth the erytage that nevere was of hys blod
(*CoP*, ll. 110-112).

In his older age Mankind is then confronted by 'I-Wot-Nevere-Whoo' (*CoP*, l. 2968), who seeks to take his wealth. As the Boy speaks of his intentions to claim Mankind's estate, his response to him as an older man with wealth is extremely derogatory:

I go glad upon this grounde
To put Mankynde out of hys thryfte.
I trowe he stynkyth this ilke stounde.
Into a lake I schal hym lyfte.
Hys parkys, placys, and penys rounde,
Wyth me schul dryven in this dryfte
In baggys as thei ben bownde
(*CoP*, ll. 2910-2916).

The Boy's threat to Mankind's estate and his gall bladder 'Forbrostyn, I trowe, be hys galle' (CoP, l. 2900) portray both the impermanence of wealth and the vulnerabilities of older age. As the Boy continues to pursue Mankind's estate, he even asks him if he is dead:

Whou faryst, Mankynde? Art thou ded?
Be Goddys body, so I wene.
He is hevyer thanne any led.
I wold he were gravyn undyr grene
(CoP, ll. 2921-2924).

These remarks parallel Mankind's own moral hypocrisy since he also values material wealth above human life, when he says:

Thou my neybore schuld be hangyn hye,
Thereof getyth he neythyr peny nor pownde
(CoP, ll. 2745-2746).

This harsh response of youth to older age is significant for its negative portrayals of both of these stages of life, particularly in terms of their corruptibility to sinfulness and preoccupation with personal fulfilment. However, by the time Mankind is confronted by the Boy, he has already developed a moral consciousness and expressed his regrets for his sinful life. He is portrayed as regretful at the thought of I-Wot-Nevere-Who inheriting his wealth rather than 'myne chyldyr and myn wife' (CoP, l. 2976), highlighting his ability to consider the needs of others. As a didactic model for the audience, Mankind is able to understand the sinfulness of avarice as he expresses: '*Thesaurizat, et ignorat cui congregabit ea*' [Man heaps up treasure and does not know to whom it will accumulate] (CoP, l. 2986). The character even highlights the mistakes of his life as a moral example, for he advises the audience:

Now, good men, takythe example at me.
Do for youreself whyl ye han spase
(CoP, ll. 2995-2996).

Mankind's function as a didactic example at this point of the play is important in the context of contemporary cultural concerns about wealth after death. In wills from medieval East Anglia, Gibson has noted the anxiety as to whether worldly wealth

could affect a person's chances of salvation.⁹⁰ Therefore, the play addresses these local and cultural concerns regarding wealth management, not just in understanding the older body's vulnerability to the sin of covetousness, but in depicting Mankind's moral and spiritual realisation that material wealth has no value to him in death.

These spiritual characteristics of ageing provide further evidence that the moral and spiritual vulnerability of Mankind is signified through his body. Whilst both youth and older age are represented as stages particularly susceptible to the temptation of sin, it is the physical decline of older age and its proximity to death which heighten its signification. Yet, it is essential to note that no particular age or stage of life is connected with the *moment* of death. As World, Pleasure, Folly and the Bad Angel are discussing their plans to entice Mankind into sinfulness, Pleasure's description of the deadly sins uses the body to explain the impact of sin on the soul:

Lust-and-Lykynghe he schal have,
Lechery schal ben hys fode,
Metys and drynkys he schal have trye.
Wyth a lykynghe lady of lofte
He schal syttyn in sendel softe
To cachyn hym to Helle crofte
That day that he schal deye
(*CoP*, ll. 550-556).

Here, Pleasure outlines how the act of committing sins kills the soul, by condemning it to Hell. A similar idea is also expressed when Pleasure describes:

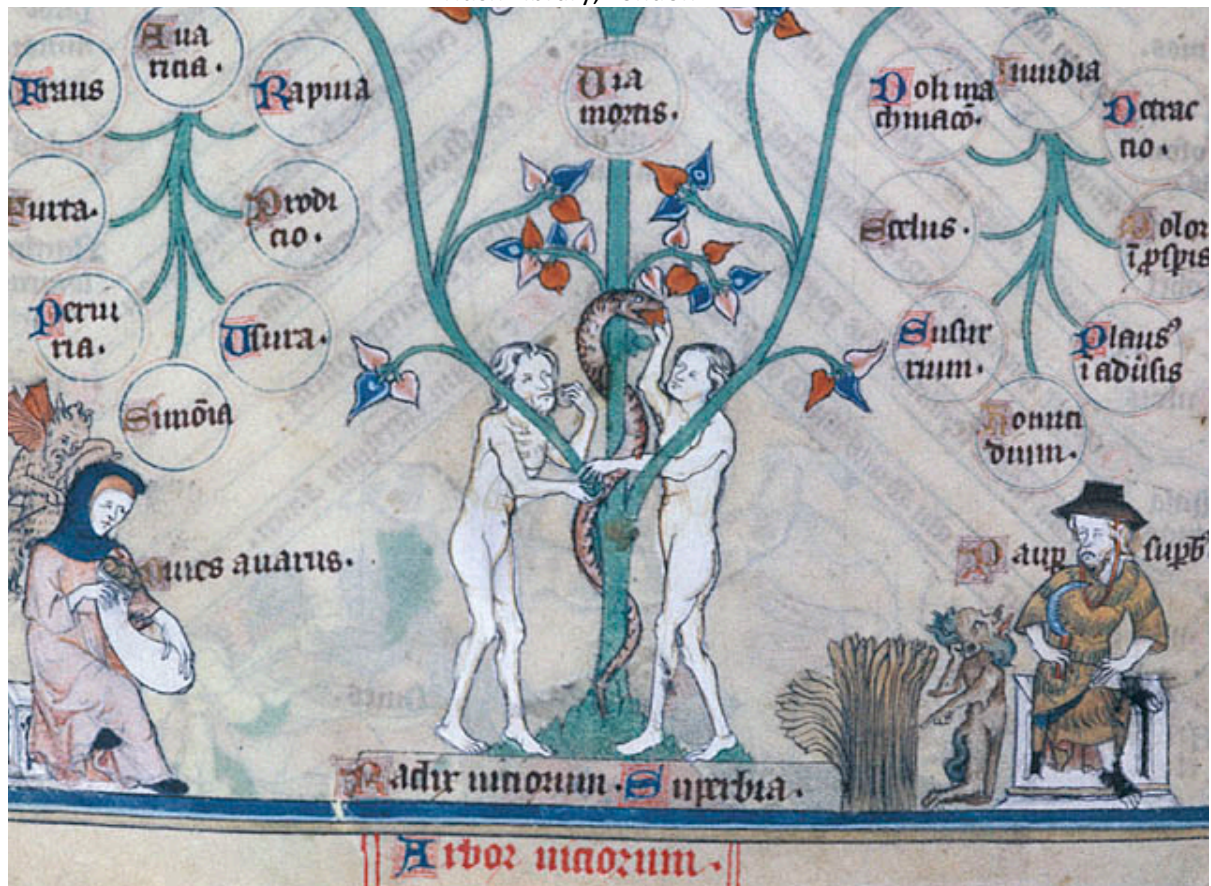
In lyckynghe and lust
He schal rust
Tyl dethys dust
Do hym to day
(*CoP*, ll. 635-638).

Although the idea of Mankind rusting is evocative of the ageing process, both of Pleasure's descriptions can be applied to any stage of life rather than just later life specifically, since the image of gradual decay is a metaphor for the death of the soul. This idea can also be seen in fig. 6 of the Tree of Vices, since *via mortis*, written in the centre of the tree, portrays original sin as the cause of death. The corruption of the

⁹⁰ Gail M. Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 27.

soul and the body are both symbolised through images of death and decay in the body of Mankind. Whilst his ageing body is a symbol of the duration of his life on earth, its condition also reflects the impact of sinning on his soul and his gradually diminishing chances of eternal life in heaven.

Figure 6: The Tree of Vices (Lower Half)
14th Century, English (De Lisle Psalter, MS Arundel 83, Part II, f. 128v)
British Library, London



The Dress of the Body and Soul:

Clothing is an important symbol throughout the *Castle of Perseverance*. The fine clothes Mankind desires in his youth are symbolic of his moral vulnerabilities to pleasure, avarice, luxury, and wealth, whereas the poorer clothes of his later years are symbolic of the character's moral decay and covetousness. Since Mankind is a character whose clothes change over the ageing process, it is interesting to consider how his clothes are used to reflect his moral and spiritual condition. In his youth the character expresses more concern to be dressed in fine clothes than for the threat of Doomsday, for he asks:

What schulde I recknen of Domysday
So that I be ryche and of gret aray?
(*CoP*, ll. 606-607).

In his old age, as the character reflects on the decrepitude of his body, he is 'arayed in a sloppe' (*CoP*, l. 2488), a loose, unfashionable gown. The contrast in the clothes of Mankind's youth and his older age highlight the different moral vulnerabilities of these ages, as well as their physiological differences. Mankind's unflattering clothing in his old age is reflective of his sinful existence and vulnerability to avarice – importantly, he now desires to hoard money rather than spend it on the fine clothes he wanted in his youth. A similar attitude can be found in medieval representations of avarice, which commonly depict the sin with a poorly dressed older body despite visible wealth. In both figs. 7 and 8, Avarice is physically decrepit and poorly dressed, despite numerous sacks of money (in fig. 7) or the large purse on her lap (in fig. 8). The same conditions of covetous old age and poor clothing (despite wealth) can be observed in fig. 9. This fifteenth-century painting by Hieronymus Bosch, which is entitled *Death and the Miser*, depicts the sinful conditions of covetous old age. The old man's physical decrepitude is evident through his walking stick, and the figure of Death at his door serves to associate all of these physical and moral conditions with old age and its proximity to death. These images provide evidence that Mankind's physical and moral embodiment of ageing conforms to stereotypical depictions of negative old age in medieval cultural thought.

Figure 7: Avarice

14th Century, French (MS Douce 332, f. 002v) Bodleian Library, Oxford

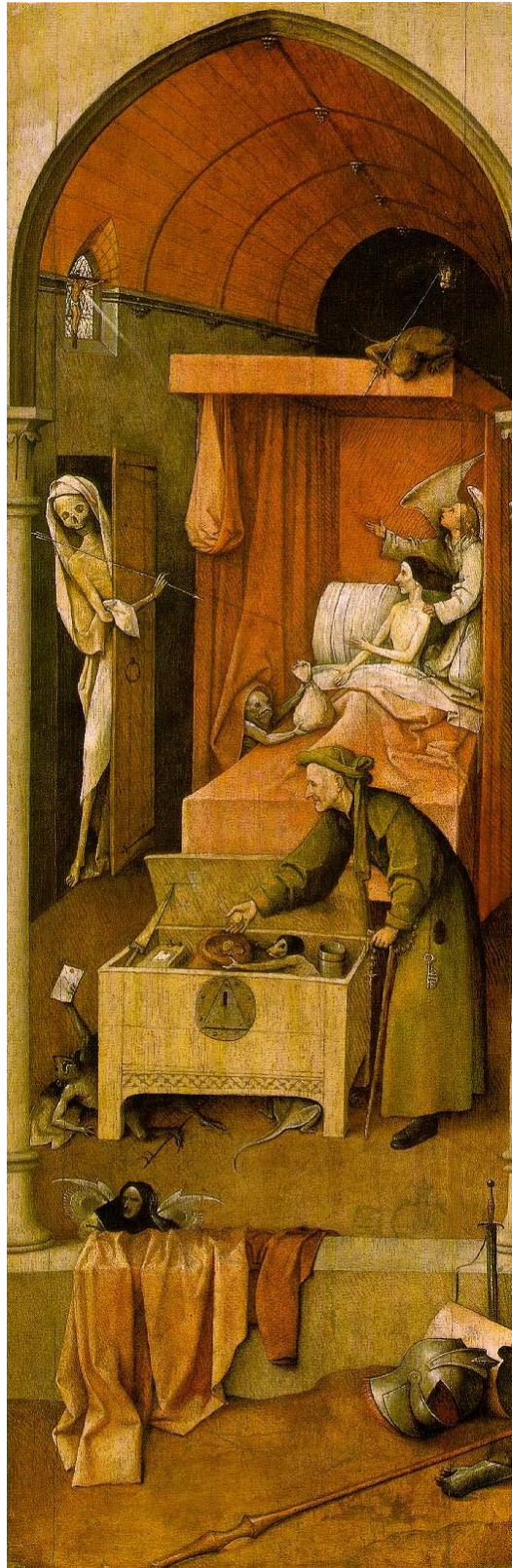


Figure 8: Avarice

15th Century, French (MS Douce 364, f. 003r) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Figure 9: Death and the Miser
15th Century, Dutch (Oil Painting, Hieronymus Bosch)
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC



Conclusion to the Sinful Ageing Body:

Mankind's sinful existence is redeemable because the character comes to understand the error of his ways prior to his death and repents his sinfulness by asking for mercy. Throughout the play older age is consistently represented as Mankind's final chance for spiritual and moral redemption due to its proximity to death. The idea of death is itself used consistently in reference to sinfulness – at the beginning of the play the Good Angel warns that mankind should always consider his death and the consequence to his soul in order to abstain from sin:

Man, thynke on thyn endynge day
Whanne thou schalt be closyd undyr clay,
And if thou thenke of that aray,
Certys thou schalt not synne
(*CoP*, ll. 407-410).

To think on your ending is also represented as a means to avoiding sin and living a moral life in the final lines of the play when God advises:

To save you fro synnyng
Evyr at the begynnyng
Thynke on youre last endynge!
(*CoP*, ll. 3646-3648).

Therefore, Mankind provides a didactic example in being a *memento mori* for the audience, which suggests that his entire characterisation is shaped around his death and the moral examples he can provide in the different stages of his life. This also heightens the significance of Mankind's older age as a crucial period characteristically vulnerable to the sinful life but also spiritually vulnerable through its proximity to death. Thus, the signification of Mankind's older body varies with his moral and spiritual condition, even though (in old age) his body remains the same. This is indicative of the complex constructions, representations, and significations of the older body, even in contexts that specifically associate the decay of the body with its moral decay.

The Devout Ageing Body

The Older Simeon in the York and Towneley *Purification*:

The biblical character Simeon was an important and respected figure in medieval cultural thought, typically represented in his older age. In the gospel of *Luke* (2:25) Simeon is described as 'just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel'. This text also explains that 'he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord' (2:26).⁹¹ Yet in the gospel there is no mention either of Simeon's old age or details of the effects of ageing upon his body. However, his old age is a defining aspect of his characterisation in medieval drama. The lack of focus on Simeon's age in the gospel means we can be sure that the representations of the effects of ageing upon him in medieval drama reflect its contemporary cultural construction. The focus on Simeon's older age is an imaginative way of conveying to an audience the historic significance of mankind's long wait for redemption. Other medieval sources generally emphasise Simeon's old age: the tenth-to-eleventh-century *Winchester Troper* which contains music and liturgical drama, consistently refers to him as 'senex', and images such as fig. 10 also portray Simeon in this way.⁹²

Although Simeon features in a number of *Purification* plays in the corpus of medieval drama, it is the York and Towneley *Purification* plays that are most valuable to explore as they provide the greatest detail on Simeon's physical effects of ageing. This allows us to examine the devout older body and the representation of the value and function of virtuous old age over these two texts. The physical descriptions of Simeon's ageing body can be used in order to examine how his old age relates to his moral and spiritual qualities, and how his character fits into medieval cultural ideas about ageing.

The *Purification* plays dramatise a crucial moment in the history of Christianity that was celebrated with the Feast of the Purification in the medieval

⁹¹ *The Gospel of Luke, The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/49001.htm>> 2:25, 2:26.

⁹² See: *The Winchester Troper: From the MSS. of the Xth and XIth Centuries*, ed. Walter Howard Frere, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1894), p. 173.

period. In the gospel of *Luke*, as the Christ child is brought into the Temple and Simeon's wait is finally over he declares:

Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace; Because my eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.⁹³

These words went on to become the *Nunc Dimittis*, a canticle that was a vital part of the daily liturgy in the medieval period. The words of the *Nunc Dimittis* were so associated with Simeon that the character paraphrases them in the Towneley *Purification* play. Therefore, as Simeon was a respected older figure in medieval cultural thought who was 'so semely in Godes sight' (*Y. PoV*, l. 79), it is interesting to explore how Simeon's defining characteristic of his old age is used in the dramatic moments waiting for and meeting with the Christ child.

Figure 10: Simeon at the Presentation (Furthest Right)
14th Century, English (Queen Mary Psalter, Royal MS BVII, f. 149r)
British Library, London



⁹³ *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Challoner, 2:29-32.

Simeon and the Physiological Characteristics of Ageing:

As Simeon is waiting for the Consolation of Israel and the appearance of the Christ child, the dramatic representation of his declining physiological condition can be contextualised by his devotion, faith and patience. Simeon's older age thus takes on positive significations of the character's virtue.

The Towneley *Purification* play [T. *PoM*] opens with a speech from Simeon in which he gives a detailed representation of his ageing body and physical decrepitude, allowing his patience to be put into context. Introducing himself 'I am old Symeon' (T. *PoM*, l. 25), the character complains of his poor health:

No wonder if I go on held:
The fevyrs, the flyx, make me unweld;
Myn armes, my lymmes, ar stark for eld,
And all gray is my berd.
Myn ees are worn both marke and blynd;
Myn and is short, I want wynd;
Thus has age dystroed my kynd,
And reft myghtis all
(T. *PoM*, ll. 29-36).⁹⁴

Simeon's grey hair, visual impairment, and sickness, are all characteristic of medieval representations of ageing. The character also describes the impairing effects of ageing upon his mobility, which is evident in his descriptions: 'I hobyll all on held' (T. *PoM*, l. 6) and 'crall I to the kyrk' (T. *PoM*, l. 42), providing further information on the physical performance of his older body. In addition, Simeon makes specific reference to the pain of his impairments, as he explains the constant suffering he endures in his older age:

sittys me downe, and grankys, and gronys,
And lygys and restys my wery bonys,
And all nyght after grankys, and goonys,
On slepe tyll I be broght
(T. *PoM*, ll. 45-48).

Although these physiological characteristics of ageing all correspond with representations in schema such as the Seven Ages of Man, as well as literary and

⁹⁴ *The Purification of Mary*, in: *The Towneley Plays*, ed. George England (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 182. All further references are to this edition.

historical sources, there is a discernible absence of the vices or emotional changes that are usually shown as characteristic of advanced age. There are no moral interpretations of Simeon's declining physical condition, nor is he associated with any of the negative traits of older age such as anger, covetousness, sloth or lechery. Although Simeon complains about his suffering, the moral faultlessness of his character makes him a figure of sympathy for the audience, for the bodily suffering that he endures could be considered to be a form of penitential devotion. This is another way in which Simeon's suffering through age can take on a positive signification in this context.

In comparison to the Towneley Simeon, the Simeon of the York *Purification* play [Y. PoV] does not provide such extensive details about his ageing body:

For I ame wayke and all unwelde,
My welth ay wayns and passeth away
Whereso I fayre in fyrrh or feylde
I fall ay downe for febyll, in fay
(Y. PoV, ll. 91-94).⁹⁵

Here, York's Simeon emphasises his ailing bodily strength, rather than mentioning specific physical impairments. As the character continues to describe the effects of the ageing process, he also makes reference to his appearance:

In fay I fall whereso I fayre,
In hayre and hewe and hyde I say;
Owte of this worlde I wolde I were.
Thus wax I warr and warr alway
And my myscheyf growes in all that may
(Y. PoV, ll. 95-99).

Simeon draws attention to his hair, hue, and skin, which suggests that these features show the visible effects of ageing and may have been represented in costume. As the character also refers to his proximity to death, this suggests the extent of Simeon's ageing and is indicative that the character is in his final old age. While his symptoms are characteristic, Simeon's lack of anxiety about death and his precise desire to be

⁹⁵ *The Purification of the Virgin*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-17-the-purification-of-the-virgin>> All further references are to this edition.

'Owte of this worlde' (Y. *PoV*, l. 97) contrast with typical cultural ideas about the feelings of older people towards death. In the last of the Seven Ages of Man, Decrepitude is specifically defined as being a time of resentment and anxiety about death. Similarly, in the Wheel of the Ages of Man's Life the Dying Man's proximity to death provokes his bitterness: 'I thought I should live forever; life has cheated me'.⁹⁶ Simeon's awareness of his impending death is an aspect of his characterisation that is represented in many medieval plays. However, it is the important purpose of his later life that necessitates his deviation from typical medieval responses to death and later life. His longstanding devotion is suggestive of a lifetime of virtue – Simeon may have no sins to repent and thus no anxiety for death.

Although Simeon expresses his desire to die in the York *Purification* play specifically, in both York and Towneley the character is determined to live to witness the Christ child, despite his suffering. In the York *Purification* Simeon appeals to God that he might see Christ before his death:

Nowe Lorde, thowe grant to me thy grace
To lyf here in this worlde a space
That I myght se that babb in his face
Here or I dy
(Y. *PoV*, ll. 137-140).

Moreover, the Towneley Simeon also makes a similar appeal, for he asks the Lord:

graunt me grace of lyfys light,
And let me neuer de,
To thou sich grace to me send,
That I may handyll him in my hend
(T. *PoM*, ll. 67-70).

These attitudes to both later life and death, present a positive approach, making the final moments of life spiritually purposeful. However, as Simeon reflects the same lack of anxiety towards death in the text of the gospel of *Luke*, this suggests that these aspects of Simeon's characterisation have been informed by biblical literature.

⁹⁶ As cited in: Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life*, p. 80.

In contrast to the Towneley Simeon, the suffering of the York Simeon exists mainly in the context of his emotional grief, which the character reflects on:

Bot thowe myghty Lorde my morning mar,
Mar ye, for it shulde me well pay,
So happy to se hyme yf I warr
(Y. *PoV*, ll. 100-102).

Simeon's inclusion of this expression of 'morning' following his description of the effects of ageing upon himself, allows his grief to be contextualised by his older age. Like the physical pain of the Towneley Simeon, his grief becomes a means of penitential suffering. The character also suggests that his misery is increasing with age: 'For aige to me grete wo hais wroght' (Y. *PoV*, l. 156). Therefore, in the York *Purification*, the declining physiology of Simeon's body could be interpreted to signify the emotional pain of his long wait. Similarly, the Simeon of the Towneley *Purification* play, also expresses his misery in relation to age, for he describes that 'ffor age nather styr ne play / Nor make no chere' (T. *PoM*, ll. 51-52).

As the York Simeon considers whether his 'two eyes shall see / That blyssed babb' (Y. *PoV*, ll. 161-162), he specifically refers to the fact that seeing the Christ child will put him 'owte of dowte' (Y. *PoV*, l. 164). As there is no mention of Simeon's misery in the gospel of *Luke*, this suggests that medieval medical ideas of his melancholic composition in his older age may have informed his characterisation. Notably, melancholy was associated with misery and had implications about spiritual doubt. Simeon's doubt also serves to increase the moment of dramatic tension when he finally meets the Christ child.

Since Simeon is an important figure who accepts that Christ is the redeemer of Israel and mankind (as was told in the prophecy), his doubt and his melancholy are not negative aspects of his characterisation, neither do they affect the positive signification of his older body. Although the Towneley Simeon reflects on the misery of his older age, he also uses his age in the context of his gratitude for life:

I thank the, lord god almyghty!
For so old know I none, sothly,
Now lyfyng here
(T. *PoM*, ll. 22-24).

Despite the misery Simeon expresses in both the York and Towneley *Purification* plays, he also specifically asks to be made happy: 'Lorde, len me grace yf that thowe pleas / And make me light' (Y. *PoV*, ll. 151-152), and defines seeing the Christ child as the time when his joy should begin: 'Now certys then shulde my gamme begynne' (Y. *PoV*, l. 103). Simeon's expression of his misery throughout both plays (as a characteristic of age) is therefore used to reflect his penitential suffering and eagerness to see the Christ child. In this context, his older body is used as a symbol of his long-held faith and suffering for Christ.

The Strength of Belief - Simeon and the Dramatic use of Devout Older Age:

The emphasis on the weakness of Simeon in the York *Purification* provides a dramatic contrast to the representation of his older body in the moment of meeting the Christ child.⁹⁷ In the dramatic moment that York's Simeon sees the Christ child, his older and weakened body is so transformed with strength that he no longer feels old:

A, Lorde, I thanke thee ever and ay,
Nowe am I light as leyf on tree;
My age is went, I feyll no fray,
Methynke for this that is tolde me
I ame not olde
(Y. *PoV*, ll. 345-349).

He goes on to claim: 'With myrth my myght alwais melles' (Y. *PoV*, l. 393) which emphasises his reinforced faith through the symbol of his strengthened body. The weakness and vulnerability of the virtuous and devout body in older age can thus be used in terms of its greater potential for strength (through the power of faith), rather than to symbolise its moral and spiritual vulnerabilities. The idea of Simeon's weakened and afflicted older body having physical strength in the context of his religious devotion can also be found in the Towneley *Purification* play, for Simeon suggests that even though he is physically incapable of work, he makes an impaired

⁹⁷ This dramatic contrast between initial weakness followed by strength upon meeting the Christ child is also likely to have been the case for the Towneley *Purification*, although it should be noted that this play is incomplete. In this play emphasis is placed upon Simeon's failing sight, so this may also have been reversed in the moment of seeing Christ for the first time.

struggle to get to church: 'Ther is no warke that I may warke, / But oneths crall I to the kyrk' (T. *PoM*, ll. 41-42). The dramatic image of strength coming to a weakened body, which reverses Simeon's suffering, also serves as a parallel to the metamorphosis of Christ in his death and resurrection. The same reversal of suffering occurs in the York *Purification*, as Simeon declares: 'My age is went, I feyll no fray' (Y. *PoV*, l. 347). Simeon's older age and impending death in medieval drama provides a contrast to the beginning of Christ's life following his Presentation in the Temple, marking the end of the customs and traditions of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

Davidson has suggested that the dramatic effect of giving strength to a weakened Simeon is deliberate and particularly great in the York *Purification*.⁹⁸ The physiological characteristics of Simeon's older age are specifically used to emphasise the dramatic moment that he meets Christ. Although the Towneley *Purification* is incomplete due to missing folios, the stress upon Simeon's impaired eyesight suggests that his eventual vision of the Christ child is likely to have contrasted with his age-related impairment. Simeon's sight is emphasised in the gospel of *Luke*, since in response to seeing the Christ child he declares that 'mine eyes have seen thy salvation', words that are included in the *Nunc Dimittis*.⁹⁹ In the play, Simeon paraphrases the canticle:

In peace, Lorde, nowe leyf thy servand,
For myne eys haith seyn that is ordand
(Y. *PoV*, ll. 415-416).

It is likely that similar words would have been used in the Towneley *Purification*. The emphasis on sight in the lines of the *Nunc Dimittis* conveys Simeon's important confirmation of the coming of Christ as the redeemer of mankind. His divinely promised vision of Christ is also notable since his eyes are failing in the Towneley *Purification*, yet his ability to see and identify the child is never questioned. Thus, Simeon's value as a witness to this event in both the York and Towneley *Purification*

⁹⁸ See note to line 91 of *The Purification of the Virgin*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Davidson.

⁹⁹ *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Challoner, 2:30.

plays is indicative of the status and authority of his age, demonstrating the positive response to older age that can be found in medieval cultural constructions of ageing.

The Older Joseph in Assorted Plays:

Joseph is another biblical character who is typically represented in his older age in the medieval period, even though there is no evidence to suggest this in biblical sources. He was consistently depicted as an old man in medieval visual culture (as in fig. 11) suggesting that this perception of him was widespread. As Joseph was also performed as an old man in medieval drama, it is valuable to explore how his age is used and what his body is used to signify.

Joseph has a number of crucial roles in the narrative of the life of Christ, and the physiological and behavioural characteristics of his age are used consistently in medieval drama to reflect upon his virtues as well as his spiritual doubts. Joseph places a lot of emphasis on the impairments of his ageing body, drawing attention to his impotence, in particular, over a range of plays. The contrast between his old age and Mary's youth is used to highlight their mutual chastity. As Joseph features in a number of plays, I shall use representations of the character in the N-Town plays of the *Marriage of Mary and Joseph* [NT. MMJ] and *Joseph's Doubt* [NT. JD], the York play of *Joseph's Troubles About Mary* [Y. TAM], the Chester *Wrightes' Play* [Ch. WP], and the Coventry *Corpus Christi Purification* [Cov. Pur], in order to consider the significations of his older age, in addition to how his age is used to reflect his virtue and faith in Christianity.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ *The Purification* is defined as being lines 177-721 of *The Pageant of the Weavers*, in: *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Hardin Craig (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1902).

Figure 11: Joseph
14th Century, English (East Anglian Altar Frontal, Musée de Cluny, no. 7726)
Musée de Cluny, Paris



The Virtues of Impotence - Joseph and the Dramatic use of Devout Older Age:

In the York play of *Joseph's Troubles About Mary*, Joseph's descriptions of the effects of ageing upon his body provide detail of his weakness, frailty and incapacity, and the character emphasises the proof of his physiological decline. As Joseph describes his ageing body at the opening of the play, he draws attention to the visibility of his body:

For I am of grete elde,
Wayke and al unwelde,
Als ilke man se it maye.
I may nowder buske ne belde,
But owther in frithe or felde

For shame what sall I saie
(Y. *TaM*, ll. 5-10).¹⁰¹

Whilst this suggests his physiological decline, the fact that he draws attention to the evidence of his body suggests its significance in the play. This play concerns Joseph's doubts about the cause of Mary's pregnancy, therefore his emphasis on his declining physiology serves to emphasise that he is physically incapable of fathering a child. However, his stress on his impotence is also vital evidence of the chastity and purity both of himself and the Virgin Mary, and the miracle of Mary's virginal conception. The physical impact of ageing upon Joseph's older body is thus used as a means of heightening the validity and the miracle of Mary's conception.

The portrayal of Joseph as an old, impotent man is a consistent aspect of his characterisation in medieval drama. Significantly, York, N-Town and Chester each represent Joseph as emphatically stating his impotence in order to defend Mary's virginal conception. Whilst the York Joseph describes that: 'Thas gams fro me ar gane' (Y. *TaM*, 196), in the Chester *Wrightes' Play* Joseph outlines his health according to medieval humoral theory, where his older body and its cold humoral condition are associated with his infertility:

And myne yt is not, bee thow bould,
for I am both ould and could;
these xxx^{tie} winters, though I would,
I might not playe noe playe
(Ch. *WP*, ll. 133-136).¹⁰²

Similarly, the dramatists of N-Town also use the physical decrepitude of Joseph's ageing body to demonstrate his lack of virility. This is suggested even before the N-Town play of *Joseph's Doubt*,¹⁰³ for in the *Marriage of Mary and Joseph* the character expresses his impotence in relation to his age:

For iwys, mayden suete,

¹⁰¹ *Joseph's Troubles about Mary*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-13-josephs-troubles-about-mary>> All further references are to this edition.

¹⁰² *The Wrightes' Play*, in: *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, eds. R. M. Lumiansky and D. Mills (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 102. All further references are to this edition.

¹⁰³ The N-Town play of *Joseph's Doubt* is comparative to the York play of *Joseph's Troubles About Mary*.

An old man may not rage
(NT. *MMJ*, ll. 296-297).

In the *N-Town Plays* the portrayal of Joseph's impotent older age is used in conjunction with his absence for a number of months. The plays therefore use two pieces of evidence in order to prove the chastity of Mary and Joseph, strengthening belief in the virginal conception. The character's physical absence, coupled with his impotent older age, is indicative of the complete impossibility of Joseph having conceived the child himself.

Joseph expresses his insecurities about Mary's pregnancy in *Joseph's Doubt* from the *N-Town Plays*:

Ya, ya, all olde men to me take tent
And weddyth no wyff, in no kynnys wyse,
That is a yonge wench, be myn asent,
For doute and drede and swych servyse!
Alas, alas, my name is shent!
All men may me now dyspyse
And seyn: Olde cokwold, thi bow is bent
Newly now after the Frensche gyse!
(NT. *JD*, ll. 49-56).¹⁰⁴

It is notable that Joseph makes this appeal to all older men, presenting himself as representative of the concerns and vulnerabilities of his age group. Although Joseph's role as a doubter is used as a platform to address and represent the natural doubts of the credibility of a virginal conception in the minds of the medieval audience, his concern for his social reputation as a cuckold is also particularly interesting here. The fear of being a cuckold in conjunction with the appeal to older men specifically, suggests that the episode addresses contemporary social concerns about older men with young wives. This concern has already been expressed in the *N-Town Trial of Mary and Joseph* [NT. *ToMJ*], for Detractor 1 argues:

A yonge man may do more chere in bedde
To a yonge wench than may an olde.

¹⁰⁴ *Joseph's Doubt*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-12-josephs-doubt>> All further references are to this edition

That is the cawse such a lawe is ledde,
That many a man is a kokewolde
(NT. *ToMJ*, ll. 102-105).¹⁰⁵

Joseph's personal anxieties about young women are also expressed in the play:

An old man may nevyr thryff
With a younge wyf, so God me save!
Nay, nay, sere let bene!
Shuld I now in age begynne to dote?
If I her chyde, she wolde clowte my cote,
Blere myn ey and pyke out a mote
And thus oftyntymes, it is sene
(NT. *MMJ*, ll. 278-284).¹⁰⁶

The particular attention given to the threat of young women implies that the issue of women's potential infidelity also needs to be addressed in order to confirm the validity of Mary's virginal conception. It is especially interesting that this potentially negative preconception of the Virgin Mary due to her age and sex occurs in the East Anglian *N-Town Plays*, since the cult of the Virgin Mary was particularly strong in this region at this time. Yet, it is not the Virgin Mary herself that is being doubted, but women in general. At this stage of the play, the contrasting ages of Mary and Joseph are used to emphasise her sexuality, demonstrating the common medieval view of young women as sexually voracious.¹⁰⁷ Joseph's misogynistic attitude is a reflection of the vulnerabilities and insecurities brought about by his old age. Thus, not only does Joseph's older body reflect his own chastity through his lack of virility, but his fear of Mary as a young woman in addition to his fear of being a cuckold serves to portray his innocence through the powerless symbol of his ageing body. Joseph expresses a similar view of young women in the *Chester Wrightes' Play*, for he remarks:

God, lett never [an] ould man

¹⁰⁵ *The Trial of Mary and Joseph*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-14-trials-of-mary-and-joseph>> All further references are to this edition.

¹⁰⁶ *The Marriage of Mary and Joseph*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-10-marriage-of-mary-and-joseph>> All further references are to this edition.

¹⁰⁷ Joyce Salisbury, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 86-87.

take to wife a yonge woman
ney seet his harte her upon,
lest hee beguyled bee
(Ch. *WP*, ll. 145-148).

However, in this speech, the vulnerability that Joseph reflects of himself is emotional rather than physical.

Although the characterisation of Joseph in medieval drama conforms with medieval constructions of ageing, Woolf has particularly criticised the portrayal of Joseph in the Coventry *Purification* as a foolish and irritable older man on the grounds that he continues to express his misogynistic and anti-matrimonial sentiments after the Nativity. The extent of his characterisation as a foolish and powerless older man affects the Virgin's characterisation, as she orders him around like the demanding young woman Joseph makes her out to be.¹⁰⁸ Thus, after being asked by Mary on a number of occasions to procure some turtle doves for the Purification, he moans:

For he that weddyth a yonge thing
Mvst fullfyll all hir byddyng
(Cov. *Pur*, ll. 466-467).¹⁰⁹

When Joseph finally attempts to find some turtle doves he spends a considerable number of lines (Cov. *Pur*, ll. 506-521) complaining about the difficulties of this task:

For age I am waxun almost blynd.
Those fowlis the ar full far fro me
And werie yvill for me to fynde
(Cov. *Pur*, ll. 511-513).

Even after an Angel delivers the turtle doves to him at line 522 and Joseph is able to fulfil Mary's request, he is then reluctant to proceed to the Temple without a rest, for he protests that he has 'laburde all this dey' (Cov. *Pur*, l. 552). In his stubbornness, Joseph again reflects on the suffering of his older body and tells Mary that she should 'goo thyselve' (Cov. *Pur*, l. 559) to the Temple, grumbling again about

¹⁰⁸ Woolf describes this as being an "obliteration of a religious pattern". See: Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (California: University of California Press, 1980), p. 200.

¹⁰⁹ *The Purification*, in: *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Hardin Craig (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1902), p. 48.

marriage before Mary and Joseph eventually depart to the Temple. By delaying the important moment of the Purification, Joseph is delaying the will of God. While Woolf sees problems with this characterisation, Joseph's foolish and stubborn older age, combined with the physiological suffering of his ageing body, play a role in defining the character's doubts and difficulties with this significant moment in the life of Christ. This recapitulates his role in the York play of *Joseph's Troubles about Mary* representing the natural anxieties of the audience and helping them to recognise the true miracle of Christ's birth.

Although Joseph is impaired by his older age in each of the texts I have examined, as Woolf has observed, Joseph's difficult behaviour in the Coventry Corpus Christi *Purification* continues after the Nativity, when such doubts and fears are normally swept aside. It is possible that this change in the structure of the biblical episode may have been intended to create humour, not only through Joseph's behaviour in his older age, but by presenting a more realistic response to what is being asked of him. There is further evidence of Joseph as a humorous character in his insistence that he needs a rest after procuring the turtle doves, even though the audience know that the Angel gave them to him: something that he does not tell Mary. Mary and Joseph's married life is therefore a source of humour, since the audience know that Joseph is lying as he suggests he is a good husband for procuring the doves:

Loo! dame, I haue done thy bydding
And broght these dowis for oure offeryng;
Here be the bothe alyve.
Womon, haue them in thy honde,
I am full glade I haue them fond.
Am nott I a good husbonde?
(Cov. *Pur*, ll. 539-544).

Joseph's prejudices towards young women also highlight his role as a humorous character that relates to contemporary culture, since ballads of older men with young wives and repeated stock jokes on women and marriage were popular in fifteenth-century England.¹¹⁰ However, it is older men with young wives in general,

¹¹⁰ See: Paul Hunt, *Fifteenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 67.

rather than Mary and Joseph specifically, that are the subject of the humour. There is also dramatic irony in Joseph's preconceptions of the Virgin Mary. Overall, Joseph is a figure of sympathy in his old age rather than of ridicule. The comedy this character creates is in his very human response to a miraculous situation, and the incongruity of such a 'normal' character in the retelling of this biblical episode. Thus the negative physiological and behavioural characteristics of Joseph's age are used to humanise the character.

Throughout these plays it is interesting to see how different aspects of Joseph's characterisation in his advanced age can be used to very different effect. Even though Joseph has many of the negative character traits of older age such as his doubtfulness, foolishness, and stubbornness, it is the context that defines the positive signification of his character. Thus, even when Joseph exhibits challenging behaviour during the Coventry Corpus Christi *Purification*, this results in humour that assists the audience in recognising the true miracle of Christ's birth. Unlike Mankind in the *Castle of Perseverance*, Joseph's older body is never used to signify either moral or spiritual decay.

Conclusion to the Devout Ageing Body:

Older age is a defining characteristic of both Joseph and Simeon, which reflects contemporary cultural constructions. Simeon's physiological features of old age are symbolic of his virtue and patience, for his *physical* endurance emphasises his *spiritual* endurance in waiting for and believing in the Consolation of Israel. Likewise, Joseph's impotence and doubts about Mary are aspects of his old age that emphasise the chastity of both himself and the Virgin, thus heightening the miracle of Christ's conception. For both characters, then, the decline of the body is used to attest to their moral virtue, in stark contrast to the ageing body in the *Castle of Perseverance*.

3) Chapter Conclusion

Defining the medieval cultural construction of old age, this chapter has explored the ageing body in terms of its moral, religious and spiritual significations, whether it is a

body in moral decline or a time of virtue. The multivalent significations of the ageing body within medieval drama stem from its ambivalent cultural construction.

The ageing body takes on a spectrum of meanings in medieval drama, drawing on late-medieval literary and visual cultures as well as religious, cultural and medical thought. For instance, medical ideas about the bodily humours and the coldness and sickness of the older body feature throughout the corpus of medieval drama. However, whilst the signification of the older body as being colder, suffering poor health and physically impaired is standard, these physiological characteristics of ageing take on different significations in drama depending on the moral status of the character. Mankind's ageing body represents its moral decay, whereas the older virtuous body is used in biblical drama to symbolise exemplary qualities such as patience, faith, chastity, and even penitential suffering. It is not just in terms of the physiological characteristic of ageing where we see this contrast in signification between sinful and virtuous characters. Negative features of old age such as foolishness, stubbornness, and misery, are used to positive effect for Joseph and Simeon respectively, whereas Mankind's age-related anxieties make him vulnerable to covetousness.

In the *Castle of Perseverance*, despite Mankind's heightened vulnerability to sinfulness in his older age, the text conveys that the human body is *always* vulnerable to sin. In turn, sinning is specifically linked to the death and damnation of the soul:

To cachen hym to Helle crofte
That day that he schal deye
(*CoP*, ll. 555-556).

It is through these ideas that the ageing body can symbolise the impaired moral and spiritual condition of Mankind, the death and damnation of the soul, and his gradually diminishing chances of eternal life in heaven. This range of symbolism applied to the ageing body demonstrates how allegorical drama uses medical and cultural ideas of disabilities and impairment specific to old age.

It would have been natural for a late-medieval religious society to associate the

ageing body with sinfulness because it is the time of final repentance for sins, the stage at which man has most knowledge of how much he has to atone for and least time to do so. In morality plays the older body is symbolic of its need for penitence – this is in contrast to biblical characters, whose agedness is a form of penitential suffering. In biblical drama, the devout older body can be used positively to symbolise virtues such as patience and faith due to the wisdom of experience and the length of time devoted to virtuous behaviour, which is itself associated with the decline of the body and symbolised by its older appearance. Therefore, the devout older body in death does not signify the last chance for repentance (having already lived a virtuous life) but presents the glory of a virtuous death.

Although the disabled body *can* signify sinfulness and moral vulnerability, there is not *always* a connection between the disabled body and sinfulness. Consequently, age-related disability and impairment does not necessarily signify sinfulness in its own right. As it has emerged over this chapter, the moral and spiritual significations of the older body are not only variable by context, but variable even for individual characters. Overall, the inconsistent uses of ageing and the older body demonstrate how biblical plays are more likely to focus positively on old age as a characteristic of Christian patriarchs, using it to support or lend credibility to biblical events. It also highlights the contrasts between the sinful ageing body and the virtuous ageing body, and how disability and impairment are used in morality and biblical plays respectively.

Chapter Two

Jewish Embodied Difference and Disability: Constructions, Representations and Signification

1) Introduction

There was a mixed reception to the Jews during the medieval period in Christian Europe. Despite their common ancestral heritage, whereas Old Testament Jews were acknowledged with respect, contemporary Jews were often derided. The Jews of the Old Testament were God's chosen people: among them, Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Messiah. As contemporary Jews disputed the validity of Christ as this Messiah, they were heretics in the eyes of Christians. These responses to the Jews can be seen in the thirteenth-century *Annals of Burton* in which contemporary Jews were considered to be Judas' 'demonic descendants', despite their 'praise-worthy ancestors'.¹¹¹ Consequently, Jews who had not converted to Christianity came to be interpreted as both morally and spiritually impaired. The Jews' disbelief in Christ and their role in his death meant that contemporary Jews were considered to be the enemies of Christianity, and in league with the devil.

The Jews' perceived inability to recognise Christ as the Messiah led to a number of accusations that their thinking was according to the flesh, their understanding impaired, and that they were blind to spiritual truths. St. Augustine reflected:

For the Jews too saw Christ. It is no great thing to see Christ with the eyes of the flesh, but it is great to believe in Christ with the eyes of the heart.¹¹²

Here, St. Augustine refers to 'eyes' in order to convey the spiritual faith of Christians in believing in Christ as God, in addition to the spiritual blindness of the Jews. Even though Christ did appear in the flesh before the Jews, they were criticised for their

¹¹¹ As cited in: S. Tomasch, "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew", in: *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. J. Cohen (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 245. *The Annals of Burton* are the monastic annals of the Benedictine abbey of Burton-upon-Trent.

¹¹² As cited in: Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), p.4.

flesh-bound thinking since he possessed no visible, definitive proof of his divinity to convince them. This limited approach to faith is insinuated in *The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, which states that: 'Jews require signs'.¹¹³ As this failure of the Jews to believe in Christ was consistently referred to in connection with their blindness, this disability became increasingly associated with the unconverted Jew.

Due to their spiritual beliefs, the Jews also became increasingly associated with disability in general. In *On Tobit and on the Canticle of Habakkuk* Bede wrote:

Tobit, blind as he was and preaching God's word, is said to signify both reprobate and elect alike. For the patriarch Jacob too, while wrestling with the angel, was both lamed and blessed, signifying, that is, by his limping the unbelievers of his nation, and by his blessing the believers.¹¹⁴

In these words, both Tobit and Jacob embody the mixed reception to the Jews of the Old Testament and the unconverted Jews. Bede explains that Tobit's blindness and Jacob's limping signify their impaired spiritual beliefs, whereas Tobit's preaching and Jacob's blessing are symbolic of the believers. Since the Jews were accused of understanding according to the flesh, it is striking that their disbelief is also signified through the physical disability and impairment of the body. The use of the body in conveying this metaphor of the Jews' spiritual impairment conforms to medieval ideas about the interrelatedness of the body and the soul, since the condition of the body was often used to signify the moral and spiritual condition of the individual.

The medieval construction of the Jewish identity (by which I mean unconverted Jews and not Christians of Jewish racial origin) was consistently associated with sickness, disability and impairment. Jewish physiology was connected to a number of different physical and psychological disabilities and impairments, including blindness, madness, a humoral excess of melancholy, leprosy, physical deformity, haemorrhoids, and even male menstruation. Many of these conditions reflect on the moral and spiritual impairment of the unconverted Jew. Madness, for instance, was associated with the Jews' impaired understanding of

¹¹³ *The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, *The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/53001.htm>> 1:22.

¹¹⁴ Bede, *On Tobit and on the Canticle of Habakkuk*, ed. and trans. S. Connolly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), p. 43.

Christ, and male menstruation was considered a divine punishment for deicide.¹¹⁵ Thus, in its medieval construction, Jewishness *itself* is a form of embodied difference synonymous with bodily infirmity.¹¹⁶ The important fact that conversion to Christianity always results in the lifting of disabilities in medieval plays, lends further support to the connection between Jewishness and infirmity.

In medieval drama, it is the unconverted Jews that embody cultural constructions of Jewishness. The moral and spiritual impairment of these characters is always connected to their Jewish identity, as is any physical or psychological disability or impairment. Although the spectrum of signification examined in this chapter is narrowed to the unconverted Jewish body, this is necessary in order to understand a representative response to the medieval construction of this identity. Due to the focus of this thesis, I will narrow it further, to examine only unconverted Jewish characters that are afflicted with physical or psychological forms of disability, impairment, and sickness.

Whilst not all unconverted Jews in medieval drama are afflicted with forms of physical disability or impairment, it is possible that the moral and spiritual impairments associated with their identity could have been otherwise represented through costume. Thus, I will discuss how the performance of the Jewish body may have encompassed physical impairments or distortions whether or not this is not directly apparent in the play-texts.

It is clear that that the unconverted Jewish body is associated with a range of disabilities and impairments. This chapter argues that the disabled or impaired Jewish body *always* signifies its moral impairment and spiritual alterity in medieval drama.

Jewish Alterity in the Context of Disability and Impairment

The associations made between the medieval cultural constructions of Jewish identity and particular physical, psychological, behavioural and moral traits, allow us to define how the Jews fit into ideas about impairment. A wide range of physical

¹¹⁵ Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 182.

¹¹⁶ As stated previously, I use the term “embodied difference” to refer to manifestations of “otherness” that are seen as being encompassed within the body during the medieval period.

impairments was associated with the contemporary Jewish body. Although not all of these disabilities feature in the drama, it is essential to understand the extent to which in popular understanding the Jewish body was defined by its physical and moral impairment. This range of associations presents the spectrum of signification of the unconverted Jewish body.

The association of Jewish identity with both blindness and sickness is embodied in the allegorical symbol of the owl. The owl was used as a symbol of the Jew in medieval bestiaries such as the *Physiologus Latinus*, which states in its section on the owl: 'This beast is the figure of the Jewish people'.¹¹⁷ Owls were synonymous with sickness, in part, due to the etymological coincidence that the Latin for owl, *bubo*, was the same as the Greek term for the swelling symptomatic of colorectal cancer.¹¹⁸ As a consequence, owls appeared in a number of medieval medical manuscripts as a symbol for ailment in general.¹¹⁹ As a nocturnal species, owls were considered to be blind during daylight, and were therefore associated with blindness and darkness. For this reason, owls were compared to the Jews who 'cling to the darkness of their ignorance and shun the bright light of Christ'.¹²⁰ The *Acts of the Apostles* also refers to the 'darkness' of the Jews, when God commands Paul to:

open their eyes, that they may be converted from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.¹²¹

Thus, the 'darkness' of the Jews reflects their spiritual impairment, which is represented through their physical inability to see Christ as the true Messiah. In medieval visual culture, this association with blindness could be represented in manuscript images through the obscured vision of the Jews such as with blindfolds, or with demons covering their eyes (see fig. 1). In literary culture, this metaphor could also be represented through genuine blindness, as is the case in the N-Town

¹¹⁷ *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, ed. and trans. Michael J. Curley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Nicole Eddy, "Bad News Birds", British Library: Medieval Manuscripts Blog (2012), <<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2012/10/bad-news-birds.html>>

¹¹⁹ See the fifteenth-century *Liber Medicinarum* by John of Arderne, Harley MS 5401, fol. 46r, owned by the British Library.

¹²⁰ B. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 137.

¹²¹ *The Acts of the Apostles, The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/51001.htm>> 26:18.

Assumption of Mary in which the Second Prince loses his sight and his sanity after the Jewish High Priest orders the Princes to obtain and desecrate the dead body of the Virgin Mary. The marginal image of a Jew shooting an arrow into the eye of the owl in fig. 2 is an illustration of this connection between Jews and owls in their shared 'blindness'.

St. Paul is the most notable example of a blind Jew, and the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul* is a play that demonstrates a clear relationship between disability and disbelief, followed by healing upon conversion. Yet, blindness could be responded to as an exemplary quality in the Christian body. St. Francis, for instance, was not stigmatised for his blindness – texts such as St. Bonaventure's *Major Legend of Saint Francis* explain how he received this disability as a result of his religious devotion, for:

He preferred to lose his sight rather than to repress the devotion of his spirit and hold back the tears which cleansed his interior vision so that he could see God.¹²²

St. Bonaventure's attribution of Francis' blindness to severe penitential and cleansing weeping completely reverses the signification of the blindness of the Jews, who are unable to see and understand the validity of Christianity. In St. Francis' case, blindness is a means of penitential suffering to see God more clearly. Although blind Jews such as St. Paul are represented as finding God through their affliction and suffering in medieval drama (just as St. Francis does), images of the blindfolded Synagoga are a case-in-point that the association between blindness and Jewishness is firmly rooted in their spiritual alterity (see fig. 3).¹²³ This response to the blindness of St. Francis demonstrates that the signification of disability in the virtuous Christian body has a much greater variability than in the unconverted Jewish body.

It was thought that Jewish physiology was predisposed to diseases such as leprosy because of the belief that the disease was caused through the circulation of corrupt

¹²² As cited in: Wells, "The Exemplary Blindness of Francis of Assisi", p. 77.

¹²³ Synagoga is a female personification of Judaism traditionally depicted with a blindfold in iconographic tradition.

and melancholy humours throughout the body.¹²⁴ The Jews were believed to have an excess of melancholic humour, as can be seen in Albert the Great's opinion that the large amount of black bile found in melancholic males 'is found in Jews more than in others, for their natures are more melancholic'.¹²⁵ Among many afflictions, the melancholic humour was associated with susceptibility to physical and mental illness, avarice, and idleness. Although the excess of melancholic humour is never directly used to explain the Jewish association with madness, there are clear connections between madness and melancholy (and between madness and Jewishness), through black bile. In influential medical texts such as Platearius' *Practica Brevis* from the twelfth century, melancholy is described as being: 'an infection of the middle cell with loss of reason'.¹²⁶ It is this symptom of impaired reason that the Jewish characters demonstrate in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, as they commit an act of host desecration in the endeavour to disprove the doctrine of transubstantiation.

The Jews are also associated with impaired cognitive abilities in their inability to properly interpret and understand the prophecy of Isaiah (as portrayed in fig. 1). In the twelfth century writings of William of Newburgh, the historian associates madness with both historical and contemporary Jews, which he asserts they demonstrated in their mass suicide in York in 1190 (rather than renounce their faith and be forced to convert), for he specifically comments that:

This irrational fury of rational creatures against themselves is truly astonishing; but whoever reads the History of the Jewish War, by Josephus, understands well enough, that madness of this kind, arising from their ancient superstition, has continued down to our times.¹²⁷

An excess of melancholy was also associated with predisposition to sins and vices, and was so associated with spiritual belief that in the thirteenth century Robert of Soest, canon of the church of Soest, is said to have converted from Christianity to

¹²⁴ As cited in: Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 118.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹²⁶ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 253.

¹²⁷ William of Newburgh, *The Church Historians of England, Vol. 4, Part 2: The History of William of Newburgh: The Chronicles of Robert de Monte*, ed. and trans. Rev. Joseph Stevenson (London: Beeleys, 1856), Book 4, p. 170.

Judaism after succumbing to melancholic infection.¹²⁸ Thus, the humoral composition of his body was perceived as directly causing his conversion to Judaism. Writing in the fourteenth century, Raymond de Tarrega describes how:

demons are attached to human bodies because of bad disposition and corrupt humor, or, because of melancholic infection which generates evil, black and horrible images in fantasy, and disturbs the intellect, for the demons habitually habit such forms.¹²⁹

The humour was also connected to a lack of faith, for Hildegard of Bingen in her *Causes and Cures* from the twelfth century writes:

at Adam's fall the devil scorched the melancholy within him, and in this way [the devil] sometimes makes a person subject to doubt and lack of faith.¹³⁰

These two descriptions of melancholy provide evidence of its associations with impaired intellect, lack of faith, and the devil, that existed in medieval medical thought. Although neither of these texts refer specifically to the Jews, these associations of the melancholic humour are particularly appropriate for the Jews, whose associations with impaired intellect, a lack of faith, and the devil, exist independently.

Overall, medieval constructions of Jewish identity and physiology were consistently associated with forms of sickness, disability and impairment. These manifold associations demonstrate how Jewishness constitutes a form of embodied difference. Whilst the embodied difference, moral and spiritual impairment of the Jews can be signified through bodily infirmity, it also exists beyond it, in any signifier of Jewish identity.

¹²⁸ Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 193.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 358.

Figure 1: The Blindness of the Jews
14th Century, Spanish (Yates Thompson 31, f. 133) British Library, London



Figure 2: Hybrid Jew shoots an Owl
13th Century, French (Add. MS 17868, f. 86) British Library, London

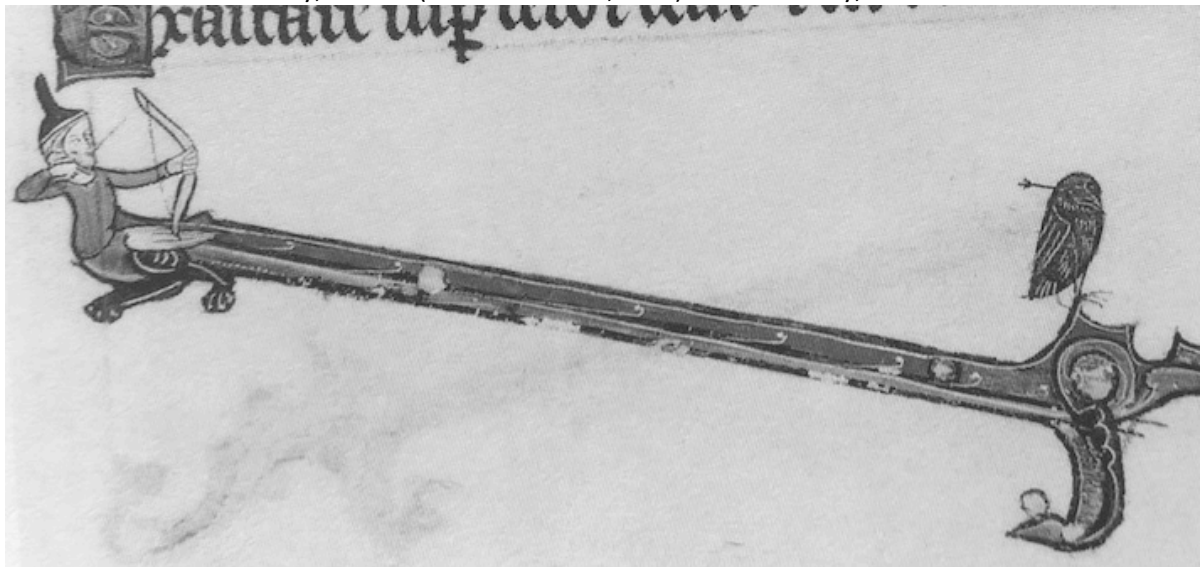


Figure 3: Blindfolded Synagoga
13th Century, English (MS Auct. D. 4. 8., f. 364v) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Jewish Physical Characteristics:

In the medieval period, a number of physiological attributes came to be associated with the Jewish body including grotesque facial features, distinctive noses, and other deformities. As many of these characteristics were defined in terms of their moral and spiritual significations, exploring them is useful in understanding how the disabled, impaired or afflicted Jewish body may have been physically performed. I will consider the face and the nose as the main areas in which Jewish racial delineation and deformity is likely to have been visually portrayed in dramatic performances.

The exaggeration of the nose is a particularly common physical deformity associated with the Jews, as well as the devil: in a cartoon upon the Roll of the

Exchequer for 1233 the depictions of Jews and devils alongside each other have obvious similarity in their exaggerated noses (see fig. 4). The horned devil shown on the second left in the image, Colbif, is pointing to the noses of two contemporary Jews, Mosse Mokke and his wife Abigail, in order to draw attention to their deformed noses and their similarity to his own appearance. This image specifically refers to Jews connected with moneylending, as Mokke and Abigail worked as money collectors in thirteenth-century Norwich for Isaac fil Jurnet, one of the richest Jews in England.¹³¹ Overall, the similarity between the exaggerated noses of the Jews and the devil is suggestive of their association with the devil, and thus, their spiritual impairment.

The cartoon drawn upon the tax roll in fig. 4 is valuable evidence since it deliberately exaggerates the noses of contemporary Jews within the context of their wealth. The Jews were associated with covetousness because moneylending for interest was not forbidden for Jews, as it was for Christians, which made them vulnerable to accusations of usury. In Langland's *Piers Plowman* the illustration of the allegorical character Covetous (see fig. 5) is evocative of stereotypes of Jewish physiology:

He was bitelbrowed and baberlipped, with two blered eighen;
And as a letheren purs lolled hise chekes –
Wel sidder than his chyn thei chyveled for elde;
And as a bondeman of his bacon his berd was bidraveled.¹³²

Here, the sin of covetousness appears to be symbolised with Jewish physical characteristics, such as thick lips, bleary eyes, baggy cheeks and a bearded chin, although there is no evidence that Langland used this character to evoke Jews specifically.¹³³ The features in this description can also be observed in an image of a Jew in fig. 6, who also possesses defined lips and eyes with large pupils, emphasised

¹³¹ "A Medieval Mystery", The National Archives Website (2008),
<<http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/education/medieval-cartoon.pdf>>

¹³² William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, eds. J. M. Dent and E. P. Dutton (1993),
<<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/PPLan/1:6?rgn=div1;view=toc>> B-Text, passus 5, ll. 188-191.

¹³³ James Davis argues that the illustration of Covetous shown in fig. 5 "incorporated characteristics from carved figures of avarice and misers, as well as from contemporary depictions of Jews". See: James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 98. Sara Lipton also connects these physiological traits with the Jews specifically, see: Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, p.104.

cheeks and a bearded chin, with a large, exaggerated nose. Comparably, it is striking that Chaucer does not provide any physical descriptions of Jews in the *Prioress's Tale*, even though the tale focuses in detail upon their murder at the hands of Christians.¹³⁴ The Jewish identity is, instead, recognisable in cultural perceptions of the race as barbaric child-murderers. However, it is possible that Chaucer left out descriptions of their physical characteristics in order to highlight the moral similarity between the violent murders committed by both Jews and Christians in this tale.

Even though the Jews were often represented with exaggerated noses in medieval visual culture, Lipton has made the vital point that the shape of Jews' noses were 'too varied to constitute markers of identity' and that there was 'no single, identifiable "Jewish" nose' that was not also shown on 'bad' non-Jews as well.¹³⁵ Despite this variation, an exaggerated nose was clearly associated with the figure of the Jew. Returning to fig. 4, what is most notable about the exaggeration of the nose is how unnatural it appears. This is suggestive of the medieval construction and distortion of Jewish physiology.

The large noses associated with the Jews in the medieval period could also signify concupiscence. The physiognomical text the *Secreta Secretorum* from the fifteenth century outlines this connection between a large nose and concupiscence, although it does not specifically refer to the Jews:

Tho that haue grete Noosys lyghtely bene talentid to couetise,
and bene desposyd to concupiscence, and bene likened to
oxen.¹³⁶

Physiognomical texts provide us with an account of some of the multivalent significations of noses, which is important since Jewish noses were not just exaggerated in one particular way. Different nose shapes are described as signifying different attributes in texts such as the *Little Book of Physiognomy* and the *Secreta Secretorum*, copies of which were in circulation during the late-medieval period. In the *Little Book of Physiognomy*, a hooked nose (such as in fig. 7) could signify

¹³⁴ See: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Prioress's Tale*, in: *The Riverside Chaucer*, eds. Larry Benson and Fred Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 209-212.

¹³⁵ Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, p. 109.

¹³⁶ *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, ed. R. Steele (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1898), p. 228.

'drunkenness, voraciousness, arrogance and wantonness'.¹³⁷ In the *Secreta Secretorum*, crooked noses (such as in fig. 8) could signify lechery. Strickland has noted that the crooked nose signifies an inability to find God and Christian truth, which is particularly relevant in the body of the unconverted Jew.¹³⁸

It is also worth considering whether the exaggerated noses of the Jews would have featured in the performances of drama. In accounts from Toledo Cathedral in Spain, the expenditure for the 1493 performance of the Corpus Christi procession makes reference to the making of 'four Jews' masks'.¹³⁹ Although it is unknown what these masks would have looked like, the very fact that masks were used to differentiate the physical characteristics of Jews and mark them out as being *distinctly Jewish* suggests the uniform distortion or exaggeration of facial characteristics over the four masks. Noses would have been the most obvious feature to exaggerate, which also suggests that the masks used physical characteristics in order to represent the moral and spiritual deformity of the Jews. In England, there are records of performance using masks with long noses for covetous characters, which can be found in the Revels accounts for 1552 indicating the masks of 'covetous men with long noses'.¹⁴⁰ This evidence of distorted noses being used to signify sinfulness in medieval drama is suggestive of the performance of the Jews since they were believed to be particularly vulnerable to covetousness. Thus, it is possible that such a mask could have been used in the performance of Jewish characters in medieval drama. The noses of the Jew masks may have been long, although the evidence above also suggests they could have been pointed, hooked, or crooked.

Although the level of detail expressed in physiognomical texts such as the *Little Book of Physiognomy* is unlikely to have been conveyed to the audience in a dramatic performance, it is still important that such a range of negative moral and spiritual implications of different nose shapes not only match medieval depictions of

¹³⁷ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews*, p. 77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ P. Meredith and J. E. Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1983), p. 255.

¹⁴⁰ Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2002), p. 240.

Jews throughout visual culture, but medieval cultural associations with Jewish identity. Since the disabilities and impairments of unconverted Jews in medieval drama can signify these same moral and spiritual impairments, it is valuable to consider the ways in which the deformities and distortions of the Jewish body convey meaning.

Figure 4: Cartoon on a Tax Roll
13th Century, English (Document E 401/1565) The National Archives, Surrey



Figure 5: Covetousness from Piers Plowman
15th Century, English (MS Douce 104, f. 027r) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Figure 6: Jew

13th Century, English (Salvin Hours, Add. MS 48985, f. 29r) British Library, London



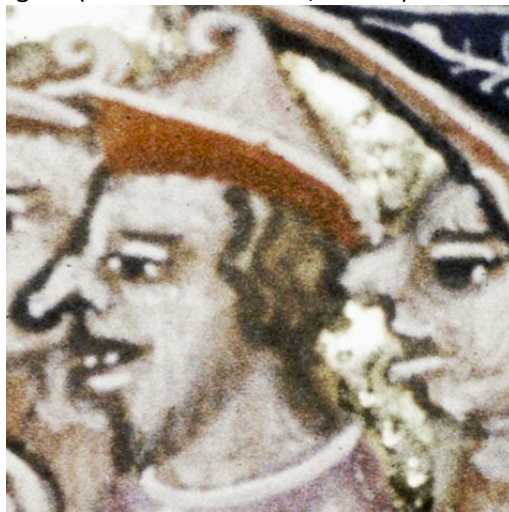
Figure 7: Jew with Hooked Nose

14th Century, English (MS Laud Misc. 165, f. 084v) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Figure 8: Jews with Crooked Noses

14th Century, English (MS Laud Misc. 156, f. 279r) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Social and Religious Responses to the Jews:

Ideas about Jewish moral and spiritual impairment can be seen in a number of social and religious responses to the race. In particular, the Jews' participation in Christ's crucifixion was a popular perception in the medieval period, and can be found in the *Book of Margery Kempe*:

the cruel Jewys leydyn hys precyows body to the crosse and
sithyn tokyn a long nayle, a row and a boistews, and sett to hys
on hand and wyth gret violens and cruelnes thei drevyn it thorw
hys hande.¹⁴¹

Meditations on the intense suffering of Christ were extremely common in the medieval period in order to encourage affective piety. The consistent reinforcement that the Jews caused this suffering led to the stereotype that they were cruel and barbaric – as van Court has pointed out:

if the Jews were capable of deicide, they were capable of any
abomination imaginable.¹⁴²

This idea is central to understanding the widespread negative social responses towards the Jews throughout medieval culture. The perception of the Jews as the enemies, torturers and murderers of Christ are typical aspects of Jewish characterisation in medieval drama. This perception continued to be applied to contemporary Jews in accusations of host desecration, which also featured in medieval drama as well as visual culture (see fig. 9).

A contemporary extension of involvement in the crucifixion was enmity to the body of Christ in the host. A number of accusations of host desecration occurred over the late-medieval period. Notably, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is based on an account of a miracle alleged to have occurred in Spain in the fifteenth century, in which Jews attacked the host wafer in the endeavour to disprove transubstantiation.¹⁴³ Records from a court book in Schlettstadt in 1409, even provide evidence that in the endeavour to frame the Jews for host desecration, a

¹⁴¹ Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book I, Part 2, ll. 4553-4556.

¹⁴² Elisa Narin van Court "The Siege of Jerusalem and recuperative readings", in: *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 161.

¹⁴³ *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 537.

Christian stole a host wafer and carried it to a Jewish house.¹⁴⁴ This Christian fabrication of host desecration provides evidence of how the medieval construction of Jewishness and Jewish barbarism was actively perpetuated in order to reinforce this racial stereotype.

Similar negative social responses can be seen in the idea of the Jews as child murderers. A number of accusations were made against the Jews for murdering Christian children, with notable examples being the murders of William of Norwich in 1144, of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255, and Simon of Trent in 1475.¹⁴⁵ The Jews' cultural reputation for child murder (even of their own children) served to convey their inhumanity and barbarism. This social response towards Jews was also popularised in medieval romances such as the fourteenth-to-fifteenth-century *Titus and Vespasian* in which a woman roasts her own child for food.¹⁴⁶ In one legend, a Jewish glassmaker from Bourges is said to have attempted to kill his own son upon discovering that he had attended church and taken communion.¹⁴⁷ As the son had consumed the body of Christ as the host wafer, his father's attempt to kill him is also comparable to host desecration.

In religious responses, the Jews were also considered to be morally and spiritually impaired through their numerous associations with the devil. These associations can be traced back to the New Testament, since the Jews are referred to by Christ as being 'of your father the devil'¹⁴⁸ in the gospel of *John* (8:44) and anti-Christian Jews are described as 'the synagogue of Satan'¹⁴⁹ in the *Book of Revelation* (2:9). This perception of the Jews can also be found in medieval drama – in the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul*, for example, Paul's initial endeavour to persecute the

¹⁴⁴ Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 106.

¹⁴⁵ See: "ritual murder", in: *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Norman Roth (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 566-570.

¹⁴⁶ See: *Titus and Vespasian: or The Destruction of Jerusalem in Rhymed Couplets*, ed. J. A. Herbert (London: Roxburghe Club, 1905).

¹⁴⁷ Marcus Roberts, "Lincoln" National Anglo-Jewish Heritage Trail Website (2013), <<http://www.jtrails.org.uk/trails/lincoln/places-of-interest>>

¹⁴⁸ *The Gospel of John, The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/50001.htm>> 8:44.

¹⁴⁹ *The Book of Revelation, The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/73001.htm>> 2:9.

Christians fulfils the ambitions of the demon Belial. Jews were not only *like* devils, as the cartoon in fig. 4 highlights, but actively under their command. This idea is also demonstrated in fig. 10, which depicts the devil pointing to Christ before the Jews, tempting them to persecute him.

All of these negative social and religious responses to the Jews are rooted in and constructed from their opposing beliefs and attitudes towards Christ at the time of his existence. These beliefs and attitudes appear to have been magnified as traits of Jewish identity and perpetuated in medieval ideas about contemporary Jews. These responses to the Jews' moral and spiritual corruption are important as they are specifically drawn upon in dramatic episodes, framing the physical or psychological impairment suffered by the Jews. It is this connection between the moral, spiritual, and physical condition of the Jews that emphasises the signification of their disability and impairment.

Figure 9: Desecration of the Host
15th Century, English (MS Harley 7026, f. 13) British Library, London



Figure 10: The Devil tempts the Jews
13th Century, French (Bible Moralisée, MS Bodl. 270b) Bodleian Library, Oxford



2) Plays

In this chapter, the play-texts I examine concern the bodies of unconverted Jews who are presented with explicit physical or psychological disabilities and impairments. The reason I will not reflect on disability and impairment in the bodies of Old Testament Jews or Christians of Jewish racial descent, is that these bodies do not reflect or embody the medieval cultural constructions of Jewishness discussed throughout the introduction. This is due to the fact that non-Christianity is an essential component of medieval constructions of Jewishness, with the disabilities and impairments physiologically associated with this identity (such as blindness and insanity) specifically denoting their moral and spiritual impairment.

Although a wide range of Jewish characters in medieval drama are not presented as impaired, these characters would not be relevant to discuss within this thesis. However, it is worth considering why these Jews are not presented as physically impaired. The Jews feature prominently in the plays of Christ's Passion as the enemies, torturers and murderers of Christ, but few of these characters suffer overt forms of disability or impairment. As Christ's wounded body is the explicit

focus of many plays that involve the Jews, the wounded or impaired body has a signification that is in complete contrast to the bodies of the disabled or impaired Jews. Most importantly, no forms of physical or psychological impairment are associated with Christ's torturers in the biblical sources, or in medieval sources that recall this episode. Furthermore, Jewish embodied difference, moral and spiritual impairment, which can be signified in any marker of Jewish identity, are aspects of their identity that are already represented in their role in Christ's Passion.

Of course, not all unconverted Jews were depicted or portrayed as being physically afflicted or impaired (even though they would have been considered spiritually impaired). If the symbolic image of the owl conveys Jewish blindness and sickness in its own right, then these associations clearly exist beyond the Jewish body. So while the non-disabled Jewish body can tacitly signify disability, this chapter argues that the disabled or impaired Jewish body *always* signifies moral impairment and spiritual alterity in medieval drama.

Not all of the disabilities and impairments associated with the Jews and discussed in this chapter appear in medieval drama: there is no Jewish leprosy, hemorrhoids, male-menstruation, or excess of melancholy. This may be due to the fact that with the exception of leprosy, these conditions would not be visible in dramatic performances, although it may also reflect that these associations with Jewish physiology are less dominant or less symbolic.

In two of the plays I discuss, the Jews are physically afflicted in a way that is not directly associated with Jewish physiology. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Jonathas the Jew loses his hand, and the First Prince is afflicted with a withered hand in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*. Both of these forms of disability are used as a symbol of spiritual incompleteness, and the hands are restored again upon conversion to Christianity. These afflictions are significant considering the Jewish synonymy with bodily infirmity. Even though these afflictions differ from the more common impairments such as blindness and madness, the resulting signification is still Jewish moral and spiritual impairment.

In the first play I discuss, I explore how disbelief in Christianity is explained as a form of sickness specific to the Jews in the high-medieval *Play of Adam*. In this play, it is

implied that the impaired spiritual beliefs of a character referred to as 'The Jew' are rooted in his unhealthy heart – an organ that has symbolic connections to belief, as it does in the words of St. Augustine.

I then explore how the ear-wound of Malchus in the N-Town *Betrayal* and *The Trial Before Annas and Cayphas* portrays his spiritual incompleteness. Malchus' response to his healing provides an important contrast to other afflicted Jews, since he is the only Jew not to convert upon healing. Also in the N-Town *Betrayal*, the Jews exhibit mad behaviour and lose control of their bodies, making it a useful play to examine in terms of how the Jewish identity is being used and what it is used to convey through these various afflictions of the body.

As conversion Jews make up a special category within this chapter, the last three plays which I discuss are the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the N-Town *Assumption of Mary* and the *Conversion of St. Paul*. These three plays all feature Jews who receive disabilities or impairments after committing hostile acts to Christians, but are cured upon their conversion to Christianity (with the exception of the Third Prince in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary* who does not convert and consequently goes to Hell). In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the disabilities and impairments of the Jews include wounding, dismemberment and madness, the latter two of which also feature in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*, in addition to blindness. These two plays are also valuable to examine in terms of how touch is involved in the miraculous healing of the Jews. The final play I discuss, the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul*, includes blindness and lameness as a divine punishment, dramatising the metaphorical blindness of the Jews through the acquisition of this physical disability so associated with Jewish identity. Notably, in these conversion plays, belief in Christ cancels out a range of physical and psychological impairments, thus impairment and Christianity never overlap.

Jewish Sickness in the *Play of Adam*:

The twelfth-century Anglo-Norman French *Play of Adam* [PoA] makes a fascinating connection between the sickness of the Jewish body and disbelief in Christianity. The section entitled *Processus Prophetarum* involves a debate between 'The Jew' and Isaiah, an Old Testament Jew who prophesied the coming of the Messiah. As Christ is

confirmed to be this Messiah in the *Processus Prophetarum*, it will be interesting to observe the differences between Isaiah and the Jew, and how Jewish identity is presented in relation to belief. Although the dialogue between the Jew and Isaiah is only very brief, the characterisation of the Jew changes greatly over this short span. After his initial characterisation as a non-believer the Jew is then described as having a 'sickness' by Isaiah, and seems to become eager to listen to Isaiah's prophecy and accepting of its validity, all in quick succession.

Contemporary Jews, Conflicting Beliefs:

It has been suggested that the Jew in the *Play of Adam* is representative of the contemporary Jewish community, following a tradition of staged dialogues between a Christian and a non-Christian (with a Christian victory) that became popular events in the twelfth century.¹⁵⁰ In presenting such a victory in this play, the religious beliefs of the Jew are used against him in order to display the triumph of Christianity over Judaism.

The debate begins when a Jew stands up to challenge the validity of Isaiah's prophecy about the Tree of Jesse:

Now, Sir Isaiah, dof tell me:
Is this a tale, or prophecy?
I don't know what to make of it.
Your own invention? is it writ?
You must have dreamt before you woke!
Is this for real, or just a joke?
(*PoA*, ll. 897-902).¹⁵¹

Significantly, the contemporary Jew is represented as questioning a patriarch of his own faith, casting himself in the role of the non-believer. Asking whether the prophecy is taken from the *written* scripture, the Jew demonstrates his flesh-bound thinking. Ironically, he also highlights his impaired spiritual understanding in his mistaken belief that it is *Isaiah* who cannot properly interpret reality. In response,

¹⁵⁰ See notes to: *The Play of Adam*, in: *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*, eds. Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian, trans. C. Symes (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2013), p. 65.

¹⁵¹ *The Play of Adam*, in: *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*, eds. Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian, trans. C. Symes (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2013), p. 65. All further references are to this edition. "*Ore me respon, sire Ysaïas: / Est ço fable, ou prophecie? / Que est iço que tu as dit? / Truvas le tu, ou est escrit? / Tu as dormi, tu le sonjas! / Est ço a certes, ou a gas?*".

although Isaiah quotes material from the *Book of Isaiah*, he also makes a highly specific addition, which provides evidence that the Messiah prophesied is in fact Christ. In reference to the son conceived by a virgin, Isaiah explains:

He'll have the name Emmanuel.
The news will come from Gabriel.
The virgin is the maid, Mary:
By her, life's fruit will carried be,
Our Saviour, Jesus
(*PoA*, ll. 936-940).¹⁵²

The representation of these two Jews reflects the medieval distinction between the respected Jews of the Old Testament and the contemporary, unconverted Jew. For this reason, it is noteworthy that a number of associations of intellectual and spiritual impairment are made in this play, as this highlights the medieval cultural constructions of Jewish identity as belonging to the contemporary, unconverted Jews.

It is likely that the theological difference between Isaiah and the Jew was reflected in their contrasting appearances. The Jew may have been portrayed through identifiable Jewish clothing, as the stage-directions reveal that: [s.d. Then someone from the synagogue will stand up] (*PoA*, aft. l. 896)¹⁵³ at his entry into the play, suggesting the character's place of worship is apparent from his appearance. For Isaiah, the stage-directions indicate that he is: [s.d. holding a book in his hand, dressed in a great cloak] (*PoA*, aft. l. 889),¹⁵⁴ suggesting his distinct dress as a prophet of the Old Testament.

The Sickness of Disbelief:

Following his initial dismissal of Isaiah, the Jew decides to test his prophetic validity by showing him his hands so that he may read his palms, undermining (and underestimating) the prophet by treating him like a foretuneteller. In this test, once again, the Jew demonstrates his flesh-bound approach to understanding reality.

¹⁵² "Il avra non Emanuhel. / Message en iert saint Gabriël, / La pucele iert virge Marie: / Si portera le fruit de vie, / Jhesu, le nostre salvaor".

¹⁵³ "Tunc exurget quidam de Synagoga".

¹⁵⁴ "ferens librum in manu magno indutus pallio".

Upon this physical examination, in Symes' translation of the play the Jew asks Isaiah 'Am I lovesick?' (*PoA*, l. 914).¹⁵⁵ However, a more direct translation of the Jew's question to Isaiah is: 'whether I have a heart that is sick or healthy'. This is significant in the context of St. Augustine's words that:

It is no great thing to see Christ with the eyes of the flesh, but it
is great to believe in Christ with the eyes of the heart.¹⁵⁶

Since spiritual belief in Christ through the 'eyes of the heart' has implications of the love Christians have for Christ, this reflects back on the Jew's disbelief and suggests his impaired ability to love Christ. This inability to love Christ may be what Symes attempts to represent in the translation of the Jew's sickness as 'lovesickness'.

In his understanding of the Jew's sickness, Isaiah informs him:

You have a sickness: villainy.
There is no cure that's known to me
(*PoA*, ll. 915-916).¹⁵⁷

Isaiah therefore asserts that the Jew's impaired spiritual beliefs are rooted in his unhealthy heart – an organ that has symbolic connections to belief, as it does in the words of St. Augustine. The diagnosis of the Jew's sickness as 'villainy' (*felonie*) is also especially notable, as it suggests wicked or criminal behaviour. This reflects on the role of the Jews as villains in the persecution, torture and murder of Christ, in addition to more contemporary claims about host desecrations and child murder. Thus, the sickness of the Jew, which is located in his heart as a metaphor for his spiritual impairment, also corresponds with his moral impairment.

As the Jew goes on to ask for confirmation: 'Am I sick, then?' (*PoA*, l. 917),¹⁵⁸ Isaiah responds that the sickness is: 'Of disbelief' (*PoA*, l. 918).¹⁵⁹ Isaiah's response here also attributes sickness to the unconverted Jewish body. The physical and spiritual properties of the Jew are clearly linked together, with the perceived health

¹⁵⁵ "Si j'ai le cor malade ou sain".

¹⁵⁶ As cited in: Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, p.4.

¹⁵⁷ "Tu as le mal de felonie. / Dont ne garras ja en ta vie".

¹⁵⁸ "Sui jo donc maladies?".

¹⁵⁹ "Oïl, d'errur".

of the physical body a metaphor for the condition of the soul. Even though there are suggestions that this sickness is rooted in the Jew's physiology, his sick heart also functions as a metaphor for his impaired spiritual condition: this is the sickness of disbelief.

After his 'diagnosis' with disbelief, the Jew demands that Isaiah goes: 'back then to your sorcery' (*PoA*, l. 919).¹⁶⁰ He urges the prophet to pick up from where he left off and tell his vision promptly:

Tell us your vision now, be quick,
I think there was a branch, or stick,
And somehow blossoms would arise?
(*PoA*, ll. 921-923).¹⁶¹

The Jew's reference to the Tree of Jesse as a 'branch, or stick' presents an example of his impaired interpretation of Christianity since he is taking Isaiah's words literally, and also suggests the flawed interpretation common to *all* Jews. The Jew's ambition to listen to Isaiah marks a change in tone that is also evident from the respect he shows him when he states:

We'll take you for our master wise,
And everybody within reach
Will pay great heed to what you teach
(*PoA*, ll. 924-926).¹⁶²

Here, as the Jew reflects on his power to accept and to listen to the wisdom of Isaiah, it is particularly striking that he speaks as a representative of all unconverted Jews. This, in turn, suggests that both the Jew and Isaiah are aware that the sickness of disbelief that Isaiah 'diagnoses' in the Jew is a sickness that belongs to all unconverted Jews. It is thus of further importance that the Jew holds out his hands as a means of testing Isaiah as to whether his heart is healthy or sick, because this also suggests that the Jew's physiological condition is also representative of the unconverted Jews.

¹⁶⁰ *"Ore commence de ta devinaille".*

¹⁶¹ *"Or nus redi ta vision, / Si ço est verge ou baston, / E de sa flor que porra nester".*

¹⁶² *"Nos te tendrom puis por maistre, / E ceste generacion / Escutera puis ta lecçon".*

The Jew's sudden acceptance of Isaiah's wisdom suggests his conversion to Christianity, since he forgoes the disbelief that he was said to be sick from. The conversion of the Jew would also make sense in the presentation of a Christian victory: a standard aspect of the staged dialogues in the twelfth century. Yet, it is curious that Isaiah seems to inform the Jew that he cannot be cured in this lifetime, especially since the Jew forgoes his disbelief. It is possible that Isaiah may either imply that, overall, the Jewish sickness of disbelief will not be cured in this lifetime, or that, with conversion, the Jew may be cured in the afterlife.

The dramatisation of the Old Testament and contemporary Jew in this play clearly uses belief in Christianity as a means to create a distinction between these two characters – a distinction that may also have been highlighted in the physical performance of the play. The distinctions of the contemporary Jew present how disbelief in Christianity is a central component of the medieval constructions of the Jewish identity. Furthermore, the discussion of the sickness of the Jew's body locates the spiritual and moral impairment of the Jew in his physical body. Thus, the unconverted Jew embodies a sickness that is interrelated with disbelief in Christianity, just as ideas of the body were interrelated with the soul in medieval cultural thought.

Loss of Control and Malchus' Severed Ear in the N-Town *Betrayal* and *Trial Before Annas and Cayphas*:

The N-Town *Betrayal* deals with the subject of Christ's betrayal by Judas. I first examine the group of ten Jews who come to arrest Christ but are struck down as he appears before them. These same Jews later appear to be afflicted with insanity, which I will explore in relation to their impaired understanding of Christianity.

In the same play, Peter strikes off the ear of the Jew Malchus. Christ's miraculous healing of the ear is treated differently from those miracles we find elsewhere in the conversion plays, making this impairment a valuable example to explore. Records of the audience's response to Malchus' dismembered ear (at an unknown performance) in an early-sixteenth-century criticism of continental Passion plays by Juan Luis Vives, a Valencian scholar and humanist, also allow insight into the signification of his wound and wider perceptions of the Jews, as I shall go on to

discuss. In both plays, the action brings Christ's body into direct encounter with Jewish bodies allowing for dramatic exploration of Jewish physical and psychological impairment.

The Jewish Body, Loss of Control and Mad Behaviour:

In the N-Town *Betrayal* [NT. *Betrayal*] a group of ten Jews experience a physical loss of control over their bodies. The group of Jews, who are led by Judas towards Christ and his disciples, then proceed to accost them. After Christ confirms his identity, the stage directions indicate that the Jews immediately fall to the earth:

[s.d. Here alle the Jewys falle sodeynly to the erde whan thei
here Cryst speke. And qwan byddyth hem rysyn, thei rysyn agen]
(NT. *Betrayal*, aft. l. 92).¹⁶³

This is based on the account in the gospel of *John* (18:6), and in both instances, Christ confirming his identity, revealing himself to the Jews is a theophany: a revelation of God. It is thus a sign to the Jews that they are in the presence of God – a sign that they fail to acknowledge or understand correctly in their continued disbelief. This violent impact of Christ upon the Jews also presents an image of the symbolic power of Christianity over Judaism.

In the following N-Town play, the *Trial Before Annas and Cayphas* [NT. *TB A&C*], Massanger reflects back on this occurrence with greater details about its performance as he describes:

And he seyde, "It is I that am here in youre syth."
With that word, we ovythrowyn bakward everychon,
And some on here bakkys, lyeng upryth!
But standyng upon fote, manly, ther was not on!

Cryst stod on his fete as meke as a lom,
And we loyn styll lyche ded men tyl he bad us ryse
(NT. *TB A&C*, ll. 106-111).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *The Betrayal*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-28-betrayal-procession-of-saints>> All further references are to this edition.

¹⁶⁴ *Trial before Annas and Cayphas*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-29-herod-trial-before-annas-and-cayphas>> All further references are to this edition.

These descriptions of the Jews falling to the ground help us to understand how this action was performed. Messenger's description that only some of the Jews land on their backs indicates that their falls are individual, rather than uniform and synchronised, which may have been a source of humour for the audience.

It is difficult to place this momentary loss of physical control neatly into the context of disability and impairment. Nonetheless, it is vital to consider how this temporary bodily affliction reflects specifically on the inability of the Jews to recognise or understand the signs of God. This demonstration of the Jews' spiritual impairment is then highlighted further in the temporary madness the Jews appear to exhibit. This, in turn, is noteworthy due to the cultural connection between the madness of the Jews and their impaired perceptions of Christianity.

As Judas betrays Christ with a kiss, the stage directions indicate that the Jews gather around Christ, lay their hands upon him and pull at him as if they were afflicted with insanity:

[s.d. Here Judas kyssyth Jhesus. And anoon (soon) all the Jewys come abowth hym and ley handys on hym and pullyn hym as thei were wode (crazy)] (NT. *Betrayal*, aft. l. 104).

Although the stage directions indicate that the Jews only *appear* to be behaving as if they were mad, it cannot be ignored that unconverted Jews are already physiologically associated with madness in medieval cultural thought. This mad behaviour and pulling of Christ is not mentioned in any of the biblical passages that deal with his betrayal and arrest, suggesting that the playwright has deliberately chosen to represent the Jews in this way.

In the N-Town *Betrayal*, the Jews lose control over their ability to remain standing, the control of their hands, and their behaviour as they madly pull at the body of Christ, embodying their disbelief. Overall, these physical and psychological afflictions highlight how medieval constructions of the Jewish body are specifically being used to signify their moral and spiritual impairment.

Malchus' Severed Ear and the Jewish Response:

As the Jews accost Christ, the disciple Peter gets out his sword in order to defend him and cuts off Malchus' ear. Malchus is then healed directly after his ear is severed for both actions appear in the same stage direction:

[s.d. And forthwith he smythyth of (off) Malcheus here (ear), and he cryeth "Help! Myn here! Myn here!" And Cryst blyssyth it, and tys hol] (NT. *Betrayal*, aft. l. 106).

The miraculous restoration of his ear by Christ does not prompt Malchus to convert to Christianity and to become both physically and spiritually 'whole', in contrast to the 'conversion plays', which will be discussed below. Malchus not only differs from these other Jews in his lack of conversion, but the Jews also go on to use his miraculous healing as an opportunity to malign Christ as a sorcerer. The Jew Leyon, for instance, calls Christ a necromancer:

Lete me leyn hand on hym in heye!
Onto his deth, I shal hym bryng!
Shewe forth thi wychecrafte and nygramansye!
(NT. *Betrayal*, ll. 129-131).

Like the ten Jews that fall to the earth, Malchus has been presented with a clear sign of Christ's divinity, which has interacted with his own body. The other Jews have also witnessed this miraculous healing. Yet, once again, the Jews fail to see what is right in front of them: whilst they may recognise the power of Christ as a necromancer, their interpretation of this power is wrong and they fail to see his divinity. This has the effect of portraying the Jews' spiritual 'blindness' and impaired understanding of Christianity.

It is worth considering whether the momentary loss of Malchus' ear symbolises that he is not spiritually whole, especially since the healing *does not* signify his spiritual completeness, as is the case for healing in the conversion plays. In the words of Christ, which directly follow the severing of Malchus' ear, he declares:

Put thi swerd in the shede, fayr and wel,
For he that smyth with swerd, with swerd shal be smete.

A, Judas, this treson cowntyrfetyd has thu?

And that thou shalt full sore repent!
Thou haddyst be bettyr a ben unborn now.
Thy body and sowle thou hast shent
(NT. *Betrayal*, ll. 107-112).

In these words, the damaged body and soul of Judas is evoked by Malchus' severed ear, which is only sustained in Peter's defence of Christ's arrest (following Judas's betrayal). Consequently, the idea of the damaged body and soul reflects on all the Jews, in their assistance of Judas in betraying Christ. This can also be interpreted from Christ's warning that 'he that smyth with swerd, with swerd shal be smete' (NT. *Betrayal*, l. 108), which is also (metaphorically) applicable to the Jews, implying that they will receive comeuppance for their assistance in the betrayal of Christ. Thus, Malchus' incomplete ear *does* interact with both his morally and spiritually impaired signification, symbolising the damaged body and soul that all unconverted Jews share.

Audience Responses to Malchus' Ear:

An early-sixteenth-century criticism of continental Passion plays written by Juan Luis Vives, a Valencian scholar and humanist, presents us with a unique account of potential audience responses to the severing of Malchus' ear.¹⁶⁵ This may help us to understand how it was performed and what it signified to the audience. He writes:

Then comes *Peter*, and cuttes off *Malchus* eare, and then all rings with applause, as if *Christs* betraying were now reuenged.¹⁶⁶

Although Carpenter has been careful to point out that it is not clear where or when Vives experienced this audience response, it is useful for providing a reaction of early sixteenth-century audiences to Jewish dismemberment.¹⁶⁷ The audience's applause appears to morally sanction the violence against the Jews in their role as the enemies of Christ, suggesting a general lack of sympathy for Jewish characters. In

¹⁶⁵ See: Sarah Carpenter, "New Evidence: Vives and Audience-Response to Biblical Drama", *Medieval English Theatre* 31 (2011): pp. 3-12.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

turn, this sanctioning of Jewish impairment reflects the signification of moral corruption that was attached to the Jewish body.

The severing of Malchus' ear in the N-Town *Betrayal* is likely to have been performed with a false ear. As earlier stage directions of the play indicate that some of the Jews are dressed in armour and coats of mail, it is possible that the actor playing Malchus could have worn armour over his head, with false ears attached to the side in some form. Christ's healing miracle would therefore place the severed ear back into this position. Although we can only speculate how long it took for the severing and miraculous cure of the ear to be performed, the language of Vives, in addition to the audience response, suggests that a substantial amount of Malchus' ear is detached from his body, with a visible injury caused through the violent actions of Peter. Moreover, since the ear features in Christ's healing miracle, this also suggests that the injury sustained must be significant in order to visually display Christ's miracle.

The audience's enjoyment and approval of the severing of Malchus' ear provides evidence of its visibility before the audience. Vives suggests that the audience's enjoyment comes from a feeling that revenge has been made for the betrayal of Christ. This therefore illustrates how the Jewish body of Malchus signifies his moral and spiritual impairment in order to justify this reaction.

Disability and Impairment in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*:

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* [PotS] is a fifteenth-century play-text that dramatises the conversion of a group of Syrian Jews to Christianity. The five Jewish characters of the play are all defined as Jewish through their names: Jonathas, (Judeus Primus, Magister), Jason (Judeus Secundus), Jasdon (Judeus Tertius), Masphat (Judeus Quartus), and Malchus (Judeus Quintus), which suggests their function as an embodiment of Jewish identity in the eyes of medieval Christianity.

Within the play, the Jews endeavour to test the doctrine of transubstantiation by desecrating a communion wafer. This doctrine is a testament to the divinity of Christ as the Son of God whose body and blood are embodied in the wafer and wine of the Eucharist. The physical action of the test, which challenges whether Judaism or Christianity is the valid religion, demonstrates how the Jews are

understood to perceive spiritual ideas through tangible evidence rather than through faith alone.

The scene of violent host desecration presents the Jews symbolically re-enacting the crucifixion of Christ, stabbing the wafer five times. This symbolic action recapitulates the typical role of the Jews in medieval drama as the enemies, torturers and murderers of Christ. As the Jews receive physical afflictions after their desecration of the host, it is interesting to consider what the Jewish characters signify through the impairment of their bodies. The cure and conversion of the Jews is also an important element of what their afflictions signify about their identity as unconverted Jews specifically, especially since it is conversion to Christianity that results in the lifting of disability and impairment. Notably, it is in repeating the suffering and mutilation of the Passion that the Jews are converted.

A number of scholars have questioned if the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament* genuinely represent Jews, or stand for Lollards or other heretical believers. Chief among them, Cecilia Cutts' influential essay of 1944, argues that the figure of the Jew in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is used to represent the contemporary Lollard threat to Christianity.¹⁶⁸ Most recently, Chemers has considered whether the play is designed to address contemporary anxieties, raising further questions about whether the Jews genuinely represent Jews, since there was no Jewish threat to fifteenth-century Christian England.¹⁶⁹ For this reason, as well as considering the significance of the Jews, I will compare how Jonathas and Aristorius are portrayed in relation to their beliefs in Judaism and Christianity respectively, and seek to determine the influence of any contemporary anxieties on the play that may be reflected through the Jewish characters.

Mutilating the Wafer, Maiming and Madness:

The Jews are driven to desecrate the wafer in order to prove that transubstantiation is false and that the Eucharist wafer is not the body of Christ. The idea to procure the host wafer and test this doctrine begins with Jonathas, who is a wealthy merchant

¹⁶⁸ See: C. Cutts, "Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece", *Modern Language Quarterly*, V (1944): pp. 45-60.

¹⁶⁹ Michael Chemers, "Anti-Semitism, Surrogacy, and the Invocation of Mohammed in the Play of the Sacrament", *Comparative Drama*, 41(1), (Western Michigan University, 2007), p. 33.

and the 'chefe merchaunte of Jewes' (*PotS*, l. 196).¹⁷⁰ Consequently, of all the Jews, it is Jonathas who suffers the most impairment in this play.

At many points throughout the play up to the point of the host desecration, Jonathas ridicules the capacity of Christians to 'beleve on a cake' (*PotS*, l. 200). The word 'cake' is used by the Jews on numerous occasions to describe the wafer, and has the effect of portraying their misunderstanding of its spiritual function and value. Jonathas represents the belief in transubstantiation as itself a form of disability, since he reflects that the Christians would have to make the Jews 'wyld' (mad) if they were to be convinced of its reality when he states:

ther feyth ys false:
That was never He that on Calvery was kyld
Or in bred for to be blode: yt ys ontrewed als.
But yet with ther wyles thei wold we were wyld
(*PotS*, ll. 213-216).

Here, it is particularly striking that Jonathas uses a disability normally connected to Jewish spiritual alterity, in order to represent the insanity of Christianity in its false beliefs. This heightens the irony of his words, for the Jews' incapacity for faith is connected with their own afflictions with insanity later in the play. Thus, the Jews ironically foreshadow their own madness in misunderstanding the spiritual properties of the host wafer.

The Jews test the doctrine of transubstantiation by stabbing the wafer: an act they commit 'To prove in thys brede yf ther be eny lyfe' (*PotS*, l. 460). Thus, the Jews examine the physical reality of the wafer in order to test the physical reality of Christ. The Jews begin to suffer from physical and psychological impairments shortly after their tests upon the host wafer have begun. After Jason, Jasdon, Masphat, and Malchus have each stabbed the host wafer, Jonathas delivers its fifth wound, equivalent to the side wound in the body of Christ. With this symbolic fifth wound, the host wafer begins to bleed. Jonathas responds with confusion and fear, and the

¹⁷⁰ *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, ed. J. Sebastian (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sebastian-croxton-play-of-the-sacrament>> All further references are to this edition.

other Jews prepare a cauldron of boiling oil in which to cast the wafer. As Jonathas is due to cast in the wafer, he finds that it will not come away from his hand:

I may not awayd yt owt of my hond!
I wylle goo drenche me in a lake,
And in woodnesse I gynne to wake:
I renne, I lepe over this lond!
(*PotS*, ll. 500-503).

Jonathas is so troubled at these events that he begins to feel as if he is going mad. His comments about committing suicide by drowning himself correspond with William of Newburgh's remarks about the madness of the Jews. The madness of the character also features in the stage directions: [s.d. Her he renneth wood with the Ost in hys hond] (*PotS*, aft. l. 503), which describes the physical performance of his condition through his erratic movements. The dramatisation of Jonathas' affliction portrays the power of the host wafer and the challenge this presents to his Jewish disbelief. Since insanity was a condition that was particularly associated with the Jews, the madness of Jonathas is not only attached to his spiritual alterity, but his identity as an unconverted Jew.

Even whilst the wafer continues to be stuck to Jonathas' hand, the Jews are still compelled to violently desecrate it. As Jasdon commands the other Jews to strike nails through Jonathas' hand, Jonathas begins to suffer the physical wounds of Christ's crucifixion:

Here is an hamer and naylys three, I seye.
Lyffte up hys armys, felawe, on hey
Whyll I dryve thes nayles, I yow praye,
With strong strokys fast
(*PotS*, ll. 508-511).

This parallel to the torture of Christ reinforces popular cultural stereotypes about the Jews as Christ's torturers and murderers. Following this violence towards Jonathas his hand physically comes away from his arm as is indicated in the stage directions: [s.d. Here shall thay pluke the arme and the hond shall hang styll with the Sacrament] (*PotS*, aft. l. 515). Staging evidence of the special effects used in Bourges in the performance of the funeral of the Virgin Mary indicates that the Jew

'Belzeray's hands must be detached and joined back onto his arms',¹⁷¹ although no information is provided about exactly how this was achieved. It is therefore plausible that a detachable hand could have been used during the dramatic performance and that the actor may have concealed his real hand as the false hand was severed from his body. The interpretation of Jonathas' dismembered hand as a symbol of his spiritual, as well as physical, incompleteness, becomes particularly apparent during its role within his cure and conversion.

The Jews react with horror to the loss of Jonathas' hand, which is still attached to the host. After the hand and host are thrown into the cauldron, it begins to boil over with blood:

Owt and harrow! What devyll ys herein?
All thys oyle waxyth redde as blood,
And owt of the cawdron yt begynnyth to rin!
I am so aferd, I am nere woode!
(*PotS*, ll. 673-676).

This significant amount of blood provides further evidence that the host wafer is the body of Christ. Overcome with fear at this miraculous display, Malchus feels as if he is going mad, thus providing another example of madness being attached to the spiritually impaired Jewish identity. In this instance, however, the near-madness of Malchus displays the challenge of this sight to his disbelief in Christianity. As this response conveys that his beliefs are able to be challenged, his experience of mad fear is symbolic of his potential to convert to Christianity. The same is also true of Jonathas – his wounds enable him to have empathy with Christ, and therefore represent his capacity to understand his divinity and the validity of the Christian religion through his impairment.

Although the unconverted Jews are forced to repeat the suffering and mutilation of the Passion, it is through these actions that they are converted. The parallel between the scene of the host desecration and the Passion of Christ is specifically drawn attention to in the banns of the play. Notably, the First Vexillator speaks of how the Jews:

¹⁷¹ As cited in: Meredith and Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama*, p. 101.

grevyd our Lord gretly on grownd
And put Hym to a new passyoun,
With daggers goven Hym many a grevyos wound,
Nayled Hym to a pyller, with pynsons plucked Hym doune
(*PotS*, ll. 37-40).

Therefore, this parallel act of desecrating the wafer and crucifying Christ anew is a connection that the dramatist specifically intends to convey to the audience. Since transubstantiation is a doctrine that is focused on Christ's resurrected body, it is significant that the Jews' desecration of the host parallels the Passion of Christ, and causes their own physical impairment in this process. It is through the pain and suffering of the Jews during the host desecration that they can be spiritually awakened. When the other Jews are compelled to stab Jonathas through the hand, he experiences the same suffering as Christ, with the Jews and their spiritual alterity to blame. The miraculous bleeding of the host wafer and the subsequent appearance of Christ as the Man of Sorrows visually re-educates the Jews in the validity of Christ and the reality of the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Cure and Conversion:

The Jews are only cured of their afflictions in the moment that they convert, symbolising the spiritual 'wholeness' that they attain through belief in Christianity. In an ironic parallel to Christ, their suffering is necessary to bring about redemption. Jonathas' conversion to Christianity occurs after an image of Christ as the Man of Sorrows appears out of the cauldron and delivers a speech in which he asks them:

Why blaspheme yow me? Why do ye thus?
Why put yow me to a newe tormentry,
And I dyed for yow on the Crosse?
(*PotS*, ll. 731-733).

In prompting the Jews to think upon their moral wrongdoings, Christ begins to spiritually and morally reform them. Interestingly, Christ also asks the Jews 'Why are ye so unstedfast in yor mynde?' (*PotS*, l. 725) connecting the Jews' impaired understanding to their persecution of Christianity and lack of faith. Towards the end of his speech to the Jews, Christ specifically draws attention to his bloody and wounded body as he offers them mercy:

I shew yow the streytnesse of my grevaunce,
And all to meve yow to my mercy
(*PotS*, ll. 739-740).

With this invitation to contemplate Christ's body as the Man of Sorrows, which was a central focus of late-medieval religious devotion, the Jews recognise the validity of Christ and ask for mercy for their sins. They then atone for their sins through penitential weeping (*PotS*, ll. 746-749).

Significantly, once Jonathas has converted to Christianity, Christ emphasises Jonathas' own blame for the afflictions that he has suffered:

No, Jonathas, on thyn hand thou art but lame,
And ys thorow thyn own cruelnesse,
For thyn hurt thou mayest thiselfe blame
(*PotS*, ll. 770-772).

As Christ heals Jonathas, he instructs him that it is through touching his detached hand that he will be healed. At this point, if a detachable hand were used, it could be reattached to the actor. Jonathas' detached hand becomes a symbol for Christ's own wounded body since it is this area of Jonathas' body that has experienced the same suffering as he has. Touching his own body in this process of healing echoes numerous examples of healing miracles in which healing occurs upon touching Christ, especially since his detached hand still contains the host wafer – a symbol of Christ's own body. The restoration of Jonathas' body therefore proves and parallels Christ's resurrection. Notably, it is in touching his hand that Jonathas is able to become both physically and spiritually 'whole' again:

Thou wasshest thyn hart with grete contrycion.
Go to the cawdron — thi care shal be the lesse —
And towche thyn hand to thy salvacion
(*PotS*, ll. 775-777).

Here, the text emphasises that Jonathas is reaching into the cauldron to 'wash' his heart with contrition, which is symbolic of his baptism and connects this absolution of sin to the restoration of his body. As Christ's heart wound is symbolic of his love for mankind, and Jonathas was himself wounded after delivering the fifth wound of Christ, it is particularly interesting that Jonathas' love and acceptance of Christ into

his heart is specifically connected to his own wounded and 'spiritually penetrable' body.

In repenting for his offences against Christianity, Jonathas makes further reference to his insanity:

Alas that ever I dyd agaynst Thy wyll,
In my wytt to be soo wood
That I so ongoodly wyrk shuld soo gryll!
(*PotS*, ll. 786-788).

Significantly, after his conversion to Christianity, Jonathas is able to recover from his madness. This demonstrates the association of psychological impairment and non-Christian alterity that was specifically attached to the Jewish identity. With these words, Jonathas acknowledges the value of his suffering in the context of his newfound spiritual beliefs, justifying his physical and psychological afflictions as a means to understand and find faith in Christianity.

Comparing the Physical, Moral and Spiritual Impairment of the Jews and Christians:

It is worth considering how Jonathas and Aristorius are portrayed in relation to their beliefs in Judaism and Christianity respectively. This will provide an understanding of how the Jews are represented distinctly, how their identity is used, and whether these contrasts suggest a specifically Jewish identity, or their symbolism of another identity, such as Lollards.

Chemers has argued against Cutts in suggesting that 'the stage-Jew is not sufficiently dynamic to act as a surrogate for a heretical Lollard'.¹⁷² However, he does interpret Jewish identity in the play as being 'fluid enough to surrogate other identities'.¹⁷³ In particular, he observes that:

the boundary distinguishing infidel Jew from infidel Muslim in
the medieval mind was certainly more permeable to the limited

¹⁷² Chemers, "Anti-Semitism" p. 33.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

fluidity of the Jewish identity than that between the Jew and any intransigent, heretical Christian.¹⁷⁴

Chemers uses evidence such as the Jews calling upon Mohammed in the play to highlight this 'conflation' of the Jewish and Muslim identity.¹⁷⁵ He also points out that Aristorius is a merchant in Aragon (a land that the Christians had lost to the Muslims in the twelfth century), in the year 1461 (the year Trebizond was lost to the Turks), thus drawing attention to the constricting borders of Christianity and the reduction in locations safe from spiritual corruption.¹⁷⁶ For these reasons, Chemers suggests that '[t]he Muslim threat is extremely present in this play'.¹⁷⁷ On the Jews, Chemers argues:

Jews had not constituted a serious political, military, or evangelical threat to European culture since the disastrous Bar Kochba uprising of 135 C.E., and in the latter half of the fifteenth century, when the Jew had been erased (officially at least) from almost all of northern Europe, it seems strange to assume that the play was designed to combat a perceived Jewish threat or to alleviate any fear of actual Jews.¹⁷⁸

However, why should the lack of a contemporary Jewish threat mean that the Jewish characters in this play do not represent Jews? In visual culture, manuscript images of the Jews torturing Christ or murdering children continue to be produced into the fifteenth century, even though, in England, stories of child murder date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁷⁹ The author of the play clearly draws upon stereotypes of the Jews, and not only is the scene of the host desecration consistent with reports from chronicles and sermons throughout Europe, but tales of Jews who corrupt a Christian in order to procure a host wafer can also be found throughout

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁵ However, as Chemers himself points out, such references to Mohammed were not uncommon from Jews, Muslims, Romans, and Pagan in late-medieval and early modern drama. See: Chemers, "Anti-Semitism" p. 27.

¹⁷⁶ Chemers, "Anti-Semitism" p. 38.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁹ See: "ritual murder: England", in: *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Norman Roth (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 566-567.

Europe (even after the expulsion of the Jews).¹⁸⁰ If the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is designed to reflect on cultural anxieties, then the identity of both Jonathas and Aristorius as merchants is highly significant in the context of contemporary concerns about the merchant trade within East Anglia, as I shall go on to discuss.

It is in this respect that there are a number of limitations to Cutts' argument that the figure of the Jew is used to represent the contemporary Lollard threat to Christianity. Whilst Cutts draws attention to the fact that the Jews are specifically represented as *merchants* in the play, she perceives that this is merely 'another attempt to draw closer the parallel of the persecution of the host to the Crucifixion of Christ'.¹⁸¹ This reading of the play does not take into account the significant attention given to portraying the merchant identities of both Jonathas and Aristorius. Although the scholar notes the importance of considering why a 'foreign' subject was chosen for an English play at this time, this may also have been shaped around the merchants of the play.¹⁸² Similarly, on the didactic function of the play, Cutts argues that it warns of 'the punishment in store for the unbeliever', but does not discuss the punishment that Aristorius receives *as* a believer – to lose his identity as a merchant.¹⁸³ The merchant identity in this play is therefore clearly more important than Cutts acknowledges.

There are a number of similarities between the Jews and the Christian Aristorius in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. Like the Jews, Aristorius is spiritually weak to covetousness, which is reflected through his morally corrupt commodification and trade of Christ's body in the form of the host wafer. This role of Aristorius as a merchant highlights his moral similarities to the Jews, not only since Jonathas is also a merchant, but due to the late-medieval anxieties about the mercantile trade and the corrupting influences of profit even upon members of the church.¹⁸⁴ Thus, in procuring the host wafer, Aristorius provides an example of the moral and spiritual

¹⁸⁰ See: J. Sebastian, "Introduction", *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, ed. J. Sebastian (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sebastian-croxton-play-of-the-sacrament-introduction>>

¹⁸¹ See footnote 30 in: C. Cutts, "Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece" p. 57.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁴ For information on mercantile trade in medieval East Anglia, see: Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, p. 72.

impairment that can be located within the Christian body. There are two crucial differences between the bodies of Jonathas and Aristorius in spite of their similarities: Aristorius is not a disbeliever, and neither does he become physically or psychologically impaired or afflicted.

Contemporary anxieties over the merchant classes can be seen in the characterisation of both Jonathas and Aristorius. Although Aristorius is not directly responsible for the host desecration he is an accessory to it, and there are many parallels drawn between Aristorius and Jonathas in the associations of their merchant trade with spiritual and moral corruption and even racial alterity. For this reason it is important that even in his Judas-like role providing the host wafer for money, Aristorius suffers no disability, impairment or affliction to his Christian body, even though, like the Jews, he is spiritually and morally corrupt.

In terms of his racial similarities to the Jews, it is significant that Aristorius regularly travels and trades with places that are not Christian, as this would involve living and operating within cultures that are racially and spiritually set apart from his own. This includes, for example, being 'among the Jewes jentle' (*PotS*, l. 105), which directly connects his identity with the Jews and demonstrates his respect for the race in his description of their nobility. Aristorius is also linked to Jonathas' spiritual alterity when Jonathas blesses him in the name of the god Mohammed to express his gratitude: 'Syr almyghty Machomyght be with yow' (*PotS*, l. 332).¹⁸⁵

Despite his considerable wealth, Aristorius is still tempted by covetousness, strongly reflecting the local and contemporary anxieties about the corrupting influences of profit. For instance, the first two times he is offered one hundred pounds for the host wafer, he answers 'I woll not for an hundder pownd' (*PotS*, l. 288) because it is 'so lytell a walew in conscyence to stond bownd' (*PotS*, l. 290), but this is the exact value it takes Jonathas to bribe him, moments later. Aristorius' spiritual impairment in his vulnerability to the sin of covetousness highlights his lack of religious devotion, since it is for profit that he violates the holy sacrament of the Eucharist. Aristorius' trade as a merchant therefore defines his approach to his

¹⁸⁵ In the medieval period it was not unusual for non-Christians to be associated with the worship of a number of different prophets, gods, and demons regardless of which god(s) or how many gods they worshipped.

spiritual identity as a Christian, since he uses the body of Christ as a commodity. However, this excessive wealth reflects more negatively on Jonathas' character than it does on Aristorius, as there were specific negative associations of Jews with excess, greed, usury and sloth within medieval culture. In Aristorius' case, Presbyter highlights him as 'worthy and notable in substance of good' (*PotS*, l. 129), which provides a contrast to Jonathas in the positive associations of his wealth in his identity as a Christian. However, this inconsistent response to Jewish and Christian mercantile trade also provides an example of the corrupting influences of trading that can go unnoticed in respectable Christian society, since Aristorius is guilty of simony.

When Aristorius expresses his regrets about procuring the host wafer, he makes a striking description of the physical punishment he feels he deserves. Notably, this punishment parallels the actions of the Jews as they put the host wafer in the oven (which itself has connotations of Hell):

That I presumed to go to the autere,
There to handyll the Holy Sacryfye,
I were worthy to be putt in brennyng fere
(*PotS*, l. 905-907).

As the host wafer is symbolic of the body of Christ, Aristorius' reflection on the punishment he deserves parallels the torment endured by both Christ (in the form of the wafer) and the dismembered hand of Jonathas when it is put in the oven. However, whilst Aristorius suffers no actual disability or impairment in punishment for betraying his faith, it is significant that rather than losing a hand like Jonathas, Aristorius loses his identity as a merchant. As a form of penance, the Bishop demands:

Now for thys offence that thu hast donne
Agens the Kyng of Hevyn and Emperowr of Hell,
Ever whyll thu lyvest good dedys for to done,
And nevermore for to bye nor sell
(*PotS*, l. 912-15).

This change imposed upon Aristorius would eradicate the similarities he has with the Jews (prior to their conversion). Thus, Aristorius' loss of stereotypical Jewish attributes such as covetousness and moral and spiritual impairment parallels the Jews' change in identity from unconverted Jews to Christians. Aristorius giving up his trade as a merchant is also noteworthy in the context of contemporary anxieties about the mercantile trade. It is the sacrifice of his merchant career that forms Aristorius' repentance and redemption in the play and it parallels the Jews' conversion in its symbolism of his moral and spiritual transformation in his devotion to Christianity. Furthermore, the physical completeness of Aristorius' body may also represent his belief in Christianity and the doctrine of transubstantiation, whereas it is in testing the host in disbelief that the Jews become impaired, symbolising their spiritual incompleteness.

The contemporary and local anxieties about the mercantile trade provide evidence of the relevance of the Jewish identity in this play. Aristorius is so driven to make money that he commits simony and betrays Christ (in the form of the host wafer), and this is surely an ultimate expression of this anxiety and the moral and spiritual impact of the mercantile trade upon Christians. The fact that Aristorius has been 'among the Jewes jentle' (*PotS*, l. 105), specifically highlights the similarity between his identity and that of the Jews. Thus, the Jews are necessary not only for their historical role in the persecution and murder of Christ but also to exhibit more contemporary accusations such as covetousness and host desecration. They also clearly conform to medieval constructions of their identity in which they are consistently associated with disability and impairment.

Overall, whilst there is a valid comparison to be made between the Jews and Lollards, who also denied transubstantiation, this does not mean that the Jews represent Lollards in this play. Since Aragon, the setting of the play, was lost to the Muslims, it is possible this may, in part, reflect fear of Islam and the threat of non-Christianity. However, this loss was centuries earlier, and whether the audience would have specifically connected this location to Islam, rather than non-Christianity in general, is uncertain. Yet, this does not mean that the Jewish characters have been specifically designed to 'stand-in' for Muslims or any other heretical identity, even if faint echoes of the threat they pose can be recognised in the play. As my

discussion has highlighted, the Jewish characters conform very strongly to the medieval construction of Jewishness. Whilst the Jews may not have posed a threat at this time, the most obvious and relevant threat addressed in the play appears to be about the corrupting influences of profit – another stereotype and indication that the Jews represent Jews.

Disability and Impairment in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*:

The *Assumption of Mary* [NT. *AoM*] dramatises the death, assumption and coronation of the Virgin Mary. In this apocryphal account of Mary's funeral, the Jews engage in graphic conversations about the ways in which they intend to maim and disrespect her body in death. They believe that she poses a threat since she could unite the many people who attend upon her against Judaism and the Jews. The Jews' intention to impair and disrespect the body of the Virgin is the background against which their moral and spiritual impairment is highlighted, and it is their attempt to act on their enmity that is the catalyst for the physical and psychological disability and impairment with which they are afflicted in this play.

Psychological impairment is the affliction that is the most widely suffered among the unconverted Jews of this play, corresponding with medieval constructions of Jewishness through the associations made between the devil, the Jews' incapacity for Christian faith, and their vulnerability to madness and melancholy. The play possesses a very similar format to the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, culminating in the cure and conversion of the Jewish characters who attempt to desecrate a holy body. Moreover, in both plays, afflictions of disability and impairment are the means through which the Jews are able to understand and accept Christianity.

The impaired morality of the Jewish characters is consistently highlighted throughout the play, not only in how it conforms to medieval cultural constructions of Jewishness, but in how it comes to define the signification of their subsequent impairments and afflictions. It is at the beginning of the play, as the Jewish Soldier (Miles) outlines his religious and political opposition to Christianity, that he

emphasises his barbaric intentions that violence be used against those that defame Jewish laws:

And of this pillid prechouris that oure lawis defame,
They schul ben slayn, as they say, or fayn for to fle!
Wherfore in pes be ye,
And herkenyth onto hem, moste stille I.
For what boy bragge outh, hym spille I
As knave wyth this craggyd knad, hym kille I!
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 33-38).¹⁸⁶

The Soldier not only describes his intent to murder and torture the opponents of Judaism, but also provides detail of the jagged club he will use. This aspect of the staging and performance of the unconverted Jews thus portrays them as barbaric and bloodthirsty from the outset.

As with the host desecration in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jews ironically direct their enmity towards impairing the body of the Virgin. Their desire for violence continues to escalate until the High Priest develops a plan to burn and dishonour the corpse of the Virgin Mary, and dismember the disciples:

But be that seustere ded — Mary, that fise —
We shal brenne her body and the aschis hide,
And don her all the dispith we can here devise,
And than sle tho disciplis that walkyn so wyde,
And here bodyes devyde!
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 83-87).

The intent to physically destroy Mary's body is significant due to her central role in the Christian interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy, that Christ is the prophesied Messiah who shall be born of a virgin. For this reason, the destructive intention of the Jews is a recapitulation of the murder of Christ. In Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, which is a source for the play, Mary herself is aware of a Jewish conspiracy and describes how she has heard the Jews saying:

¹⁸⁶ *The Assumption of Mary*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-41-assumption-of-mary>> All further references are to this edition.

Men and brothers, let us wait until the woman who bore Jesus dies. Then we will seize her body, throw it into the fire, and burn it up.¹⁸⁷

This characterisation of the Jews as conspiring to desecrate Mary's corpse was clearly popularised throughout medieval culture. The presence of this narrative in both the *Golden Legend* and the *Assumption of Mary* therefore indicates how these perceptions continue to define medieval constructions of Jewishness.

Taking Action, Receiving Affliction:

After Mary's death, the Jews still interpret her body as a threat against Judaism due to the amount of attention she receives, for the Third Prince is concerned that:

The disciplis her beryn in gret aray now,
And makyn alle this merthe in spyth of oure hed
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 386-387).

Consequently, the High Priest attempts to provoke the Jews into immediate action. It is at this point that he is first represented as suffering psychologically. Like the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the *Assumption of Mary* is a play in which we see the pattern of unconverted Jews who are intent on harming Christians themselves suffering affliction in the process. The suffering of the unconverted Jews becomes a punishment through which they can atone and convert to Christianity.

Strikingly, as the High Priest begins to lose his sanity he attributes his suffering to the devil, for he declares: 'Outh! Harrow! The devyl is in myn hed!' (NT. *AoM*, l. 389). With these words, he demands the Princes to 'brynge me that bychyd body, I red!' (NT. *AoM*, l. 396) before he acknowledges his insanity: 'Outh! Harrow! Al wod now I go!' (NT. *AoM*, l. 409). This representation of the High Priest's madness foreshadows the madness of the other Jews, as they attempt to obey these orders to obtain Mary's corpse. Following the High Priest's descent into madness, all of the other Jewish characters then proceed to display and perform their own insanity – the Latin stage directions translate as: [s.d. Here the rulers with their attendants descend like wild beasts dashing their heads against rocks] (NT. *AoM*, aft. l. 409). The

¹⁸⁷ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 465.

madness with which the Jews are afflicted can be seen to be directly linked to their identity as Jews, particularly in terms of the medieval medical ideas about melancholia, since melancholy patients may 'cry out and jump around, and wound themselves or others'.¹⁸⁸ This description from Constantine's *On Melancholy* is a close match to the behaviour of the Jews. Since the melancholic humour is also associated with the Jews' physiological susceptibility to insanity, the portrayal of the Jews suffering from this condition can be seen to reflect on their Jewish racial and spiritual alterity.

Following these stage directions, the Second Prince expresses his affliction with another disability commonly associated with the Jews, blindness:

What, devyl! Where is this mené?
I here here noyse, but I se ryth nouth!
Allas! I have clene lost my posté!
I am ful wo! Mad is my thowth!
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 410-413).

In his blindness and insanity, the Second Prince's afflictions reflect his Jewish spiritual impairment in his metaphorical blindness to the validity of Christianity. The Third Prince is the next to display his madness:

I renne! I rappe — so wo is me
Wyndand wod — wo hath me wrouth!
To deye I ne routh
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 416-418).

The Third Prince exhibits his madness in another physical display of frantic movement, which symbolises his impaired spiritual understanding. However, in contrast to the other Jews, the First Prince jumps onto Mary's bier – the stage directions indicate: [s.d. Here the madman leaps to Maria's bier and hangs there by his hands] (NT. *AoM*, aft. l. 422), his mental affliction prescribing his stage action. Consequently, the hands of the First Prince become attached to the bier, just as Jonathas the Jew becomes attached to the host wafer in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. As the First Prince hangs from the bier, he experiences physical pain in his body and is afflicted with withered hands:

¹⁸⁸ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 254.

Allas, my body is ful of peyne!
I am fastened sore to this bere!
Myn handys are ser, bothe tweyne
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 423-425).

In his suffering, the First Prince calls on the disciple Peter for help, as he pleads for him to: 'prey thy God for me here!' (NT. *AoM*, l. 426) and bring him 'Sum medycyn' (NT. *AoM*, l. 431). In the *Golden Legend*, it is the Jewish priest who leaps to Mary's bier and is subsequently afflicted with pain. His disability is justified in that:

because he had impiously tried to touch the corpse, his hands lost the power of touch. Both hands tore away at the elbows and clung to the litter, and the attacker was stricken with horrible pain.¹⁸⁹

This provides evidence that physical disability and psychological impairment were considered to be punishments both *deserved* and *because of* acts of opposition to Christianity.

Cure and Conversion:

In response to the First Prince's plea for help, St. Peter explains that the only thing he can do to save himself is to 'beleve in Jhesu Criste, oure Saveyour' (NT. *AoM*, l. 434). Upon his declaration of belief in Christ, the First Prince is able to come down from the bier, physically intact. Once again we see that the disabled and impaired bodies of the Jews are restored and made physically 'whole' again once they convert and are, therefore, spiritually 'whole'. Then, the First Prince must demonstrate his newfound spiritual beliefs by following Peter's instructions, which are directed at all the Jewish people:

take yone holy palme and go to thi nacyon
And bid hem beleve in God yif they wyl be pure,
And towche hem ther wyth both hed, hand, and facyon.
And of her sekenesse, they schal have cure,
And ellis in here peynys indure
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 440-444).

¹⁸⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 477.

With these words, Peter represents Judaism as a sickness and painful affliction that the Jewish people will be cured of through a state of purity and faith in God. This response to the morally and spiritually impaired Jew locates these 'defects' in the Jewish physical condition. Peter implies that conversion to Christianity results in the lifting of disability and impairments, creating a distinction between the Christian body and the disabled Jewish body.

After his conversion, the First Prince follows the directions of Peter and attempts to convert the other Jews. As he addresses the other Princes, not only does he specifically define them as Jewish, but he also connects their Jewish identity to the impaired bodily condition of the unbelievers of their race:

Ye Jewys that langour in this gret infyrmyté,
Belevyth in Crist Jhesu, and ye schal have helthe!
Throw vertu of this holy palme that com fro the Trinyté
Yowur sekenesse schal aswage and restore yow to welthe
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 464-467).

The First Prince represents the Jews as suffering from languor and infirmity as non-believers, which are states that are both associated with melancholy, a humour which we know Albert the Great specifically associated with the Jewish body.¹⁹⁰ Judaism is thus represented as a sickness destroying the physical body. The First Prince's attempt to convert the other Jews is successful in the case of the Second Prince, who renounces his faith in Judaism and is subsequently healed when he is touched with the palm of St. Peter. The Third Prince, however, who was portrayed to be so overcome with madness that he does not care if he dies (NT. *AoM*, ll. 416-418), has lost his sanity to such an extent that he does not convert, and consequently, the Demons take him to Hell. Notably, the Third Prince's comments about death, like those of Jonathas in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, correspond with William of Newburgh's remarks about the madness of the Jews.

The different outcomes of the Jews afflicted with madness are particularly interesting. Although the insane Second Prince converts to Christianity, this disability does not have the same effect for the Third Prince. As no Jews are taken to Hell in

¹⁹⁰ See: Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 118.

the *Assumption of the Virgin* from the *Golden Legend*, this appears to be the playwright's intentional dramatisation of the fate of the Jews that fail to convert. Presenting a Jew who goes to Hell may provide a narrative to the audience to explain and account for the Jews who have not yet converted, implying that Jews that do not convert are too impaired to ever be capable of belief in Christianity.

In the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*, the High Priest and the three Princes are shown the historical disrespect of Jews for their murder of Christ, but also take on many of the negative characteristics of contemporary Jews, in terms of their associations with the devil, bloodthirstiness, and physiological and psychological affliction. Therefore, the representation of the impaired Jewish body in this play reflects and symbolises both historical and contemporary perceptions of Jewish moral and spiritual deficit. Since Judaism is specifically referred to as a sickness that the Jewish people will be cured of through a state of purity and faith in God, the physical and psychological disability and impairment of the Jews in this play plainly signifies their moral and spiritual defectiveness.

Performing Impairment and Audience Responses:

The York *Funeral of the Virgin*, which is equivalent to the *Assumption of Mary* in the *N-Town Plays*, is now lost. The York Masons responsible for putting on the play asked to be relieved of their pageant in 1431, due to the audience's unruly response to Jewish affliction. A fifteenth-century Memorandum Book provides us with the details that:

the Masons of this city have been accustomed to murmur among themselves about their pageant in the Corpus Christi Play in which Fergus was beaten because the subject of this pageant is not contained in the sacred scripture and used to produced more noise and laughter than devotion.¹⁹¹

This provides striking evidence that the affliction of the Jews was a source of humour. It is noteworthy that Fergus the Jew is 'beaten' in this play, as this does not occur in the *Golden Legend*. However, since this play dramatised the

¹⁹¹ As cited in: *Records of Early English Drama: York 1*, eds. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 732.

dismemberment of the Jew that touches Mary's bier, it is interesting to consider whether this affliction provoked laughter, as Vives found for the severing of Malchus' ear. The account from the Memorandum Book is suggestive of the intentional use of the Jews as objects of suffering. Evidence of laughter at the Jews has also been noted for numerous other performances, as Carpenter has observed, and was a common response to scenes dramatising affliction.¹⁹² Even though such a tone is not made explicit in the actual play-text, the same audience response may well have occurred in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*.

In the *Assumption of Mary*, it is not stated explicitly whether the First Prince's hands physically detach from his body, as they do in the *Golden Legend* and the performance of the *Funeral of the Virgin* at Bourges.¹⁹³ The stage directions of the play indicate: [s.d. Here the madman leaps to Maria's bier and hangs there by his hands] (NT. *AoM*, aft. l. 422). This is exactly what the First Prince reiterates in his cry that:

Allas, my body is ful of peyne!
I am fastened sore to this bere!
Myn handys are ser, bothe tweyne
(NT. *AoM*, ll. 423-425).

Here, the evidence from the play-text seems to suggest that the First Prince's hands become withered and that he loses his control over them in his inability to separate himself from the bier, which may mark a distinction between this dramatisation and other performances and accounts. Since the Jew is, ultimately, humiliated in his affliction it may have been a source of humour. Moreover, it is in this awkward situation of hanging from the bier that the First Prince not only understands the validity of Christianity, but has to ask a Christian for help. In Vives' account of reactions to the severing of Malchus' ear, he suggests that the audience's enjoyment comes from a feeling that Christ's betrayal is avenged. This illustrates how the Jewish body of Malchus signifies his moral and spiritual impairment, since the audience appears to respond to his injury as a form of comeuppance or moral justice. Similarly, any laughter generated by the Jews' disabling in the N-Town *Assumption of*

¹⁹² See: Carpenter, "New Evidence" pp. 8-9.

¹⁹³ As cited in: Meredith and Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama*, p. 101.

Mary would reinforce the audience's lack of sympathy with the Jews, demonstrating their recognition that the Jews are morally and spiritually impaired.

Blindness and Lameness in the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul*:

The Digby *Conversion of St. Paul* [CoSP] is a fifteenth-century play-text that follows the conversion of Paul from Judaism to Christianity. As a saints' play the performance may have taken place on January 25th for the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. The play consists of three stations, the first concerning Paul's spiritual corruption such as his worldliness; the second his encounter with God and his experience of disability on the road to Damascus; and in the third, the spiritual nature of his conversion and the restoration of his body from its temporary affliction of physical disability and impairment.¹⁹⁴

As St. Paul goes on to become a particularly important figure in Christianity after his conversion, the *Conversion of St. Paul* is valuable for its contrast between the disabled and impaired unconverted Jewish body and the converted and healed Christian body. Since the play dramatises the metaphorical blindness of the Jews through the acquisition of this physical disability, it will be fascinating to consider whether Paul's spiritual blindness is also emphasised within the text.

Jewish Spiritual Impairment and the Vices of St. Paul:

In his opening monologue Paul swears by 'the god Bellyall' (CoSP, l. 29), a devil in both Christian and Jewish texts, reflecting the associations made between the Jews, idolatry and the devil throughout late-medieval society and culture. Later, Belial himself refers to the worship he receives in the: 'templys and synagogys' (CoSP, l. 417), which suggests how Paul is comparable to all unconverted Jews. Paul's original plans to persecute the Christians also fulfils Belial's stated intentions:

¹⁹⁴ The manuscript refers to three sections of the play as each of the different "stations". There has been some speculation that that these stations may indicate three separate stages on which the action was performed, although this opinion has been contested. See: Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall, "Introduction: *The Conversion of St. Paul*", in: *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160* eds. Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. xxvi.

My busshopys hathe chosyne won most rygorus
Them to persew, howse name ys *Saulus*
(*CoSP*, ll. 424-425).

Paul's association with the devil therefore clearly conforms to medieval cultural constructions of Jewishness.

As an unconverted Jew, Paul's moral and spiritual impairment is conveyed in the play's first station. The moral and spiritual differences of this same character over the process of his conversion provide a strong, dramatic contrast. One of the sources for the play, the *Golden Legend*, draws attention to the celebrated conversion of St. Paul as it poses the question: '[w]hy is Paul's conversion celebrated while that of other saints is not?'.¹⁹⁵ The text elaborates that the conversion provides an example that:

no sinner, no matter how grievous his sin, can despair of pardon
when he sees that Paul, whose fault was so great, afterwards
became so much greater in grace.¹⁹⁶

As a play dealing with conversion, Paul's initial moral and spiritual faults are vital for the play to represent in order to convey the significant powers of redemption that Christianity possesses over all souls.

The play's opening characterisation of Paul as a spiritually impaired Jew has been informed by late-medieval sources such as the *Golden Legend*, in which he is described to be susceptible to three vices that are each associated with Jews:

Paul had three vices, the first being wanton boldness ... the
second vice was insolent pride... [t]he third was that he
understood the Law according to the flesh.¹⁹⁷

There are a number of ways in which Paul's pride is evident from his initial characterisation. His boasts of fine clothing may have local connotations of sin in their echo of the temptations of rich clothing and luxury items that feature in, for example, the East Anglian *Castle of Perseverance*. Paul's boast that he has 'many a ryche garlement' (*CoSP*, l. 16) and the visual appearance of Paul in his fine dress is a

¹⁹⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 119.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

physical manifestation of his worldliness and pride.¹⁹⁸ Wealth is also a Jewish stereotype connected with the sins of usury and covetousness.

Paul boasts about his own legendary status as he introduces himself:

My fame ys best knowyn vndyr þe fyrmament!
I am most drad of pepull vnyuersall –
They dare not dysp[l]ease me most noble!
(*CoSP*, ll. 19-21).

His pride in his fearsome and powerful reputation, demonstrates his boldness, and echoes the theatrical stereotype of the boasting tyrant. This boldness is also apparent through the action he intends to take in his violent opposition to Christianity, and his justification of this cause:

Saule ys my name – I wyll þat ye notify –
Whych conspyreth the dyscyplys wyth thretys and menacys;
Before þe pryncys of prestys most noble and hye,
I bryng them to punnyshement for ther trespase
(*CoSP*, ll. 22-25).

Here, in introducing his character, Paul proudly connects his destructive ambitions to his identity. Paul's reference to the 'trespass' of Christianity against Judaism is also a bold claim since the Jews are guilty of trespasses against Christianity in the persecution and murder of Christ. It is this conviction that leads Paul to dedicate his life to avenge Judaism by sabotaging Christianity and converting its believers:

To pursewe the dyscypulys, my lyfe I apply!
For to breke down the chyrchys thus I condescende.
Non I wyll suffer that shall edyfey –
Perchaunce owur lawes they myzte therby,
And the pepull also, turne and conuerte,
Whych shuld be gret heuynes vnto myn hart
(*CoSP*, ll. 170-175).

In these bold and misguided ambitions, Paul also demonstrates his metaphorical blindness to the trespasses of Judaism.

¹⁹⁸ *The Conversion of St. Paul*, in: *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160* eds. Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 1. All further references are to this edition.

The third vice mentioned in the *Golden Legend*, Paul's understanding of the Law according to the flesh, is also significant in the context of his metaphorical and literal blindness. Paul's acquisition of blindness is symbolic of his impaired spiritual understanding, and it is ironically only through this (literal) blindness that Paul is able to 'see' the error of his ways. Thus, the metaphorical blindness of the Jews manifests itself literally in Paul's body, signifying his inability to understand Christianity.

The understanding of the Law according to the flesh, which, as St. Augustine highlights, contrasts with the faith of the heart, is also applicable to other unconverted Jews in medieval drama, such as the Jew in the *Play of Adam* who interprets Isaiah's description of the Tree of Jesse literally. Similarly, the Croxton Jews endeavour to test the doctrine of transubstantiation in their physical manipulation of the host wafer. In both the *Play of the Sacrament* and the *Conversion of St. Paul*, the Jews are only able to attain belief upon their literal, physical experiences or examinations (of blindness and the properties of the host wafer respectively). Paul's blindness and Jonathas' mutilation subsequent to examining the host wafer are thus symbolic of their metaphorical blindness and impaired understanding.

Lameness, Blindness, and Capacity to Believe:

Paul's cruel intention to persecute the disciples, all Christian men, women and children without mercy (*CoSP*, ll. 170-182), morally justifies his divine punishment of blindness and lameness. Once again we see the pattern of a Jew who intends to harm Christians but is harmed himself in the process. However, as Paul goes on to become an important figure in Christianity it seems unlikely that the affliction would have been applauded or celebrated by audiences, as Vives noted for the severing of Malchus' ear. This points to the fact that Paul's character is handled differently to other Jews in medieval drama: despite being a disabled, unconverted Jew, he is simultaneously a future Christian saint. Paul's potential as a Christian is even highlighted by God prior to his conversion:

To me assyngned by my Godly eleccyon.
He shall bere my name before the kyngys and chylder of Israell,
By many sharpe shourys sufferynge correccyon;

A gret doctor of benyngne compleccyon,
The trwe precher of the hye deuynete,
A very pynacle of þe fayth, I ensure the
(*CoSP*, ll. 235-240).

Thus, even though his disability is a form of divine punishment, it is also symbolic of what he will go on to achieve, as it is only through his physical manifestation of blindness that Paul can come to understand that he has been mistaken in his beliefs. Consequently, his disabilities simultaneously reflect his atonement and capacity for redemption.

The moment Paul receives his afflictions is recorded within the stage directions:

[s.d. Here comyth a feruent, wyth gret tempest, and Saule
faulyth down of hys horse; þat done, Godhed spekyth in heuyn]
(*CoSP*, aft. l. 182).

Although a live horse may have been used in the performance, it is unclear how Paul's fall from the horse, resulting in his lameness, was performed.¹⁹⁹ The stage-directions suggest that Paul is struck by lightning, and it is possible that fireworks could have been used in order to dramatise the lightning as there is evidence of the use of fireworks in a number of medieval dramatic performances.²⁰⁰ The sound of thunder could have been dramatised with the use of gunpowder or by making a noise offstage – there is evidence of the use of gunpowder in the 1552-3 King's College production of *Hippolytus* and an item called a 'thunder Barell' also appears in the inventory for St. John's College assigned to 1541-2.²⁰¹ Special effects such as these could have been used to distract the audience from Paul's fall or even to obscure it. This may have been necessary as such a stunt could have proved fatal or injurious to the actor.

¹⁹⁹ John C. Coldewey has discussed the use of horses onstage in performances of the *Conversion of St. Paul*. See: The Digby *Conversion of St. Paul*, in: *Early English Drama: An Anthology*, ed. John C. Coldewey (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), p. 165.

²⁰⁰ Evidence of the use of fireworks in medieval dramatic performances can be found in records from Mondane in 1580, which notes that fireworks were used "for each of the devils every time they emerge from Hell", as cited in: Meredith and Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama*, p. 105.

²⁰¹ See: *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge 2*, eds. Alan H. Nelson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 719-720.

In the moment Paul realises he has been struck blind and lame, the character calls upon the mercy of God as he describes the physical symptoms of his disability and impairment:

O mercyfull God, what aylyth me?
I am lame, my leggyes be take me fro!
My sygth lykwyse, I may nott see!
I can nott tell whether to goo!
My men hath forsake me also.
Whether shall I wynde, or whether shall I pas?
Lord, I beseche the, helpe me of thy grace!
(*CoSP*, ll. 197-203).

Here, Paul immediately calls upon the mercy of God, as if it is through his disability that he can now believe in the power of Christianity. A similar example can be found in the First Prince from the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*, for as soon as he is afflicted with withered hands, he instantly turns to Peter for help. Since Paul's disability is symbolic of his disbelief, this suggests that it is in the help both he and the First Prince seek from Christianity that their bodies can recover and thus become spiritually complete. Paul's uncertainty about which way to go also uses his disability to portray the beginning of his spiritual change: a reason that (morally) causes him to cease his journey.

Pride and Blindness, Penance and 'Sight':

Paul launches into an exposition on the seven deadly sins after his conversion, with a particular focus on pride – a sin associated with the Jews. Preaching this sermon demonstrates that Paul has conquered his own pride, and thus an aspect of his Jewish moral impairment. Paul focuses on pride since:

Off all vyces and foly, pryde ys the roote;
Humylyte may not rayn ner yet indure.
Pyte, alak, that ys flower and boot,
Ys exylyd wher pryde hath socour
(*CoSP*, ll. 516-519).

Here, Paul describes the spiritual danger of pride in its capacity to render a person incapable of humility. Whilst his sermon appeals to the morality of the audience, it is

also reflective of his own moral and spiritual transgressions as a Jew, for he specifically connects vanity and vainglory as branches of all wickedness when he preaches that:

Vanyte and vayneglory, and fals idylnes –
Thes be the branchys of all wyckydnes
(*CoSP*, ll. 533-534).

This vanity and vainglory of which Paul speaks is another way of representing his misplaced pride in Judaism over Christianity. This direct correspondence of pride with Paul's disability demonstrates how this affliction signifies his moral and spiritual impairment. For instance, in the text of the *Golden Legend* pride is represented as the sin that is directly responsible for Paul's blindness, for Christ commands Paul to: 'Take upon yourself the depths of my humility and rid your eyes of the scales of pride'.²⁰² Thus, Christ specifically attributes Paul's blindness to his sinfulness. Although the play does not directly associate the scales of Paul's eyes with pride, the same shedding of scales occurs:

The swame ys fallyn from my eyes twayne!
Where I was blynyd and coud nott see
(*CoSP*, ll. 298-299).

In the *Acts of the Apostles*, the recovery of Paul's sight is also described in terms of scales falling from his eyes:

And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and
he received his sight; and rising up, he was baptised.²⁰³

Significantly, the *Golden Legend* associates the sin of pride with another defect, when it is referred to as 'the tumour of pride'.²⁰⁴ Thus, the sin of pride can be physically manifested in both the disability and deformity of the body. As Paul's disability is symbolic of his metaphorical blindness to Christian truth, this suggests that the scales on his eyes reflect his misplaced pride in the validity of Judaism as well as his ignorance to Christianity.

²⁰² Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 119.

²⁰³ *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Challoner, 9:18.

²⁰⁴ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 119.

Once Paul has converted to Christianity and Christ has restored his sight, his words echo the sacrament of penance:

My pensyue hart full of contryccyon;
For my offencys, my body shal haue punycyon
(*CoSP*, ll. 302-303).

With these words, Paul asks forgiveness for his sins against God. This provides another parallel with the Croxton Jews since Jonathas also shows penitence and asks for absolution:

And I aske Crystendom with great devocion,
With repentant hart in all degrees,
I aske for us all a generall absolucion
(*PotS*, ll. 928-930).

In both of the appeals for forgiveness, it is noteworthy that there is consistent reference to the heart, which also features in the *Play of Adam* when the unconverted Jew asks Isaiah whether his heart is healthy or sick. These references evoke Christian ideas about belief, for as St. Augustine stated, rather than understanding according to the flesh, 'it is great to believe in Christ with the eyes of the heart'.²⁰⁵ Paul's words also reveal that he wishes to endure penitential suffering. This reflects on his previous suffering, drawing a distinction between his divine affliction with disability and impairment and his willingness to endure penance. It is ultimately the sacrament of penance that can prevent Paul from going to Hell for his sins. Wheatley raises an important point about how the playwright is specifically using the disability of blindness, explaining that:

the playwright's divergence from the biblical narrative creates an economy of physical chastisement that equates blindness with divine punishment and sight with proper self-discipline.²⁰⁶

This idea that equates sight with proper self-discipline appears throughout the play, since in his exposition on the Seven Deadly Sins, Paul warns that 'That the ley ys euer be messenger of foly' (*CoSP*, l. 571), and advises the audience to:

²⁰⁵ As cited in: Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, p. 4.

²⁰⁶ Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind*, p. 168.

Kepe clene your body from synne vncuth;
Stabyll your syghtys, and look ye not stunt
(*CoSP*, ll. 567-568).

This appeal from Paul to the audience using the metaphor of sight suggests that while blindness and lack of self-discipline are both associated with the Jews, Christians too can be warned of these dangers through this same metaphor. This suggests that upon his conversion Paul becomes a didactic exemplum for proper Christian devotion, and that blindness carries moral and spiritual connotations beyond the confines of the Jewish body.

Overall, St. Paul is represented with many characteristics associated with the cultural construction of the Jew. The moral and spiritual impairment he demonstrates in his pride, persecution of Christians, and inability to 'see' the validity of Christianity, are all evident prior to his conversion and emphasised through their signification in his physical disability and impairment. In this play, as in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*, conversion to Christianity results in the lifting of disability and impairment, which is suggestive of the distinct meaning of affliction in the Jewish body.

3) Chapter Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the disability and impairment of the unconverted Jews always signifies their moral and spiritual impairment in medieval drama. The portrayal of these Jews has been shown to correspond with medieval constructions of Jewishness in a number of ways. Their madness and blindness, for instance, can be understood to signify their impaired spiritual understanding. Likewise, the dismemberment of Jonathas in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the First Prince in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary* both connect Jewish physiology with disability and impairment. Although dismembered or withered hands are not specifically associated with the Jewish body, it follows a pattern of perceiving Jewish physiology in terms of its impairments and incompleteness. The loss of hands, just like the loss of sanity, is used metaphorically to reflect on the spiritual incompleteness of the unconverted Jews. The disabilities and impairments suffered by these Jews also reflect on their immorality, not just in terms of their historical

offences against Christ and Christianity, but also contemporary accusations such as host desecration.

The issue of Jewish disbelief is explored and dramatised through touch in two of the plays discussed in this chapter. More specifically, this is the touch of an object or person important within Christianity, as can be seen in both the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*. In both plays, it is also through touch (with belief) that the Jews are eventually cured. In Jonathas' case this is with the touch of his dismembered hand containing the host wafer, whereas the First Prince is given a palm leaf that has the potential to cure all the Jews of their disbelief if he follows Peter's instructions to touch them with it. This same pattern of disability conferred on the touch of the non-believer can be found in the N-Town play of the *Nativity* [NT. *Nativity*], in which the Virgin Mary invites the midwife Salomé to touch her to test her virginity. Consequently, Salomé suffers withered hands and goes on to blame her doubt as the cause of her impairment:

For my grett dowth and fals beleve!
Myne hand is ded and drye as claye!
My fals untrost hath wrought myscheve!
(NT. *Nativity*, ll. 255-257).²⁰⁷

Swann has observed that literary representations of Salomé 'directly engage with questions of epistemology, faith, and obstetrical medicine' and thus her impairment reflects medieval attitudes to corporeal manifestations of the sacred.²⁰⁸ Salomé's reconsideration of the Virgin's pregnancy, as a non-believer, as a midwife, as well as through her experience of impairment, therefore authenticates the miracle of Mary's virginity.

Whilst this link between touching and disbelief is particularly significant for the unconverted Jews, signifying their spiritual impairment through their physical form, it is striking how this imposed disability contrasts with the Christian body. For

²⁰⁷ *The Nativity*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-15-nativity>>

²⁰⁸ Alaya Swann, "'By Expresse Experiment': The Doubting Midwife Salome in Late Medieval England", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89(1) (2105): p. 7.

instance, in the N-Town *Appearance to Thomas* [NT. AT], Thomas also exhibits a lack of belief in the resurrection of Christ, and he states that he will not believe in it:

Tyl that I have syght of every grett wounde
And putt in my fyngyr in place of the nayles
(NT. AT, ll. 322-323).²⁰⁹

After Thomas is invited to touch Christ's wounds, his body suffers no impairment. Christ represents Thomas' doubt as an opportunity for him to strengthen his Christian faith, for as he invites Thomas to touch his wounds he asks him to 'Be stedfast in feyth, beleve wel in me' (NT. AT, l. 342). Yet, the context differs from the disbelief of the Jews, since Thomas *does* believe in Christ, he just has doubts in the resurrection. His own lack of faith is used to address the natural doubts that Christians might have. Thomas' lack of physical punishment or impairment is also a testament to the doubts that Christ allows him to possess and disprove. As Thomas' faith in Christ is strengthened in testing his disbelief, he is comparable to the portrayal of Simeon in the York *Purification*. In this play, Simeon's older body is devoid of any negative moral and spiritual significations, and used instead in the context of the greater strength his body achieves through religious devotion to the Christ child. This presents an inconsistency between touch and disbelief between the bodies of Jews and Christians. In the Christian body belief in Christ ensures that faith can only be strengthened, whereas disbelief in the Jewish body is both punished and (in most cases) corrected through the suffering of disability and impairment. As Christians are understood as already having attained a state of spiritual 'completeness' the state of their body typically represents them as a devout or didactic exemplum.

This difference also raises the important fact that in instances in which the Jews convert to Christianity, this results in the lifting of disabilities – in these plays disability and Christianity never overlap. Upon conversion to Christianity, the sickness of disbelief is cured in the *Play of Adam*; madness, mutilation and

²⁰⁹ *Cleophas and Luke; The Appearance to Thomas*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. by Douglas Sugano. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-38-cleophas-and-luke-appearance-to-thomas>> All further references are to this edition.

dismemberment are cured in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*; the sickness of disbelief, impairment and madness are cured in the N-Town *Assumption of Mary*; and blindness and lameness are cured in the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul*. Where there is no conversion, afflictions are not cured – the Third Prince from the *Assumption of Mary*, for instance, continues to remain mad and is led to Hell. As for Malchus and the Jews of the N-Town *Betrayal* and *The Trial Before Annas and Cayphas*, even though his ear is restored and the other Jews are only temporarily afflicted with loss of control, there is no conversion. However, in this instance, this lack of combined cure and conversion is informed by biblical narratives, and its function is to convey the Jews' inability to understand the divinity of Christ, even when it is right before them – thus portraying their spiritual blindness. Overall, whether or not the Jews are cured of their afflictions, the changes or lack of change to their physical or psychological condition is used to reflect on their moral and spiritual condition.

Although Jewish disability and impairment throughout these plays correspond with medieval cultural constructions of Jewishness, these bodily afflictions are still relevant to Christians as a moral example. For instance, in the *Conversion of St. Paul*, the metaphor of blindness is embodied in the character's physical disability and also used by Paul in his exposition on sin, for it is pride which blinds him and he warns that: 'Off all vyces and foly, pryde ys the roote' (*CoSP*, l. 516). Similarly, Aristorius in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* conveys the suffering in Hell that his body should face in penance (*PotS*, l. 907) paralleling the torment of Jonathas' hand in the oven, even though his own body suffers no disability or impairment throughout the play. Whilst the specific meanings of the disabled Jewish body may never be applied to the Christian body, the moral lesson it can provide is still relevant to Christians. This, too, is an important consideration in view of the medieval cultural constructions of Jewishness – suggesting that Jewish characters are used in drama to play out a specific moral and spiritual narrative.

Chapter Three

The Disease of Leprosy:

Constructions, Representations and Signification

1) Introduction

The leprous body could be defined and understood in conflicting and contradictory ways during the late-medieval period. Medical opinion saw leprosy as a serious health condition, as observed by the fourteenth-century physician Guy de Chauliac who described it as 'pe werste maladye' in his *Cyrurgie*.²¹⁰ In its physical presentations, leprosy could be a highly stigmatised disease that was both medically and culturally recognised as a signifier of specific moral and spiritual transgressions. Yet, due to the visible physical suffering that lepers endured and came to symbolise, the disease was also associated with religious penitence.

Representations of the leprous body are particularly interesting due to these multivalent significations and the ambivalent responses the disease could evoke in religious, social and medical thought, as well as in visual and literary culture. This ambivalence can be found in contradictory responses to the idea of physical contact with lepers. A number of medieval churches had small 'squint holes' for lepers to view and participate in religious services whilst physically separated from the congregation.²¹¹ Yet, not all lepers were segregated from communities, even though the fact that the Third Lateran Council ordered them to be isolated in 1179, and that the crown ordered them to be expelled from London's streets in 1346 and 1472, may point to this conclusion.²¹² The belief that lepers were already enduring purgatory on earth led many people to give them alms in acts of charity in order to lessen their own time in purgatory. As living examples of Christ-like suffering, some people deliberately exposed themselves to physical contact with lepers by kissing them, or

²¹⁰ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac: Volume 1*, ed. Margaret S. Ogden (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 383.

²¹¹ Gerard A. Lee, *Leper Hospitals in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), p. 36.

²¹² See: J. N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impact on Human History* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2005), p. 37. See also: Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), p. 22.

helping them with personal care. Primary evidence of the desire to kiss lepers can be found in the *Book of Margery Kempe*:

Now gan sche to lovyn that sche had most hatyd befor tyme, for ther was no thyng mor lothful ne mor abhomynabyl to hir whil sche was in the yerys of werldly prosperité than to seen er beheldyn a lazer, whom now thorw owr Lordys mercy sche desyryd to halsyn and kyssyn for the lofe of Jhesu whan sche had tyme and place conveyent.²¹³

Margery Kempe's desire to kiss people afflicted with leprosy came from their physical embodiment of suffering. Kissing lepers was a means through which Margery intended to demonstrate her love for Christ by identifying with his suffering, and showing compassion to all those who suffer like him. As Margery also reflects upon the repulsion she previously experienced towards lepers, she encapsulates the conflicting responses to leprosy in the fifteenth century, as well as the contrasting significations of the leprous body as either morally and spiritually impaired, or in *imitatio Christi*.

Conflicting responses towards the leprous body can also be seen throughout medieval drama, as its signification is inconsistent, sometimes even within the same play-text or collection of plays. Over the selection of plays examined in this chapter, there is variation in the acquisition of leprosy and the reasons for its acquisition; the cure of leprosy, and the approaches to its cure; the physical characteristics of leprosy, and the responses it evokes. As the disease does not necessarily define the moral and spiritual conditions of each character, it is clear that the signification of leprosy is multivalent in medieval drama. Thus, this chapter argues that leprosy in medieval drama is used variably, but either according to the leper's relationship with Christianity, or in promotion of the faith.

²¹³ Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book 1, Part 2, Chapter 74, ll. 4185-4189.

Lepers in Late-Medieval Cultural Thought

The Medieval Medical Construction of Leprosy:

Diagnosis and Epidemiology:

Medieval physicians used humoral theory in their approach to the disease of leprosy, determining that there were four types: *elephantia* (elephant disease), *leonina* (lion disease), *tyria* (serpent disease) and *allopicia* (fox disease).²¹⁴ These four types corresponded to each of the four humours, which, in turn, were associated with the four elements: earth (cold and dry), fire (hot and dry), air (hot and wet), and water (cold and wet). This was common practice for medieval physicians at the time of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with Gilbertus Anglicus (c. 1245) and Guy de Chauliac (c. 1300-1368) both determining types of leprosy by humoral theory.

By the high Middle Ages leprosy was endemic throughout Europe, but began to decline dramatically by the start of the fourteenth century.²¹⁵ Wallis has noted that at this time the identity of the disease was becoming 'more and more medicalised' which suggests that there was change in perceptions of the condition.²¹⁶ Leprosy was rare by the fifteenth century and significantly rarer by the sixteenth, due to factors such as 'climatic change, diet and improved hygiene'.²¹⁷ The decline of leprosy is a crucial development because it determines and influences the social construction of the disease at the time medieval drama was composed and performed.

The names given to the four different types of leprosy refer to the ways they affect physical appearance. In the fourteenth-century *Diagnostic Protocol for Leprosy*, Jordanus de Turre (c. 1310-1335) notes that with *elephantia*, the skin appears as if it had been flayed away; with *leonina*, the face of the leper resembles a

²¹⁴ *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 341.

²¹⁵ Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 1.

²¹⁶ *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 339.

²¹⁷ David Marcombe, *Leper Knights: The Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, c.1150-1544* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), p. 137.

lion; with *tyria*, human flesh resembles a serpent's scales; and with *allopicia*, the leper's hair falls out and they appear flayed like a fox.²¹⁸

Leprosy was conflated with a range of diseases and conditions that caused similar symptoms including:

psoriasis, fungous infections, various types of dermatitis, lupus vulgaris, lupus erythematosus, leukoderma, and erythema multiforme.²¹⁹

This highlights its much wider definition in the medieval period. The different categorisation of leprosy is also important since its impact and influence within medieval society extends beyond medieval medicine. Demaitre has observed that:

since medieval accounts of leprosy interweave traditional formulas with contemporary teaching and speculative observation with personal observation, the degree of their correspondence of reality is often hard to determine.²²⁰

This suggests that the imprecise medical understanding of leprosy affected and was affected by its complex social and cultural construction.

Causes of Infection:

Medical ideas about the potential causes of leprosy underlie the multivalent significations of the leprous body and the contradictory responses it elicited. There were a number of different theories about how leprosy was contracted. Guy de Chauliac, among many other physicians, lists one of the causes as being 'corruption of þe ayre and þe touchinge of leprouse men', suggesting that the transmission of leprosy was airborne and through direct contact.²²¹ In the *Compendium Medicinae*, Gilbertus Anglicus also specifies that the disease could be caused by 'foul air, or of the breath or aspect of another leper'.²²² A number of other causes also feature

²¹⁸ *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 337, pp. 343-344.

²¹⁹ Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 32.

²²⁰ Luke Demaitre, "The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy by Fourteenth Century Physicians", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 59(3), (1985): p. 331.

²²¹ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 378.

²²² Gilbertus Anglicus, *Gilbertus Anglicus, Medicine of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Henry Ebenezer Handerson (Cleveland: Cleveland Medical Library Association, 1918), p. 49.

throughout medical texts. Gilbertus Anglicus, for instance, also attributes some occurrences of the disease to congenital causes:

arising from conception during the menstrual period. For the corrupt blood within the maternal body, which forms the nourishment of the foetus, leads likewise to the corruption of the latter.²²³

Here, Gilbertus Anglicus explains that sex during menstruation affects the humoral composition of the foetus with corrupt blood. This corrupt blood is black bile (or melancholic humour), which is dispersed throughout the body of the foetus, corrupting both the constitution and form of its members, which results in leprosy.²²⁴ Similarly, Haly²²⁵ Abenrudian's eleventh-century commentary on Galen's *Art of Medicine* also describes how diseases such as leprosy:

are generated accidentally if conception takes place during the menstrual period, and in that case such a person can only rarely escape leprosy or a terrible illness.²²⁶

Haly Abenrudian's assertion that the disease would be caused accidentally imposes no judgement upon this cause of leprosy. This is in contrast to the opinions of St. Jerome, who explains that 'lepers and gargantuans are born from this conception' since a foetus conceived during menstruation will 'carry the vice of the seed'.²²⁷ This bears the implication that leprosy was perceived as inherited sin. Whilst these medieval accounts of the congenital causes of leprosy all share this same manner of contracting the disease, it is significant to note the conflicting explanations and responses to the disease both physiologically and morally.

Leprosy was also thought to occur through diet. Gilbertus Anglicus specifically mentions that 'infected pork and similar articles' or 'eating fish and milk at the same

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.* Leprosy is also connected with corrupt blood in Chauliac's *Cirurgie*, in which he specifies that these humours are "brente" and then "turnede into melancolye". See: Guy de Chauliac, *The Chirurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 379.

²²⁵ Not to be confused with Haly Abbas. Latinised as "Haly Abenrudian", Abu'l Hasan Ali ibn Ridwan Al-Misri was an Egyptian physician who lived between the tenth and eleventh centuries.

²²⁶ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 271.

²²⁷ As cited in: Metzler, "Disability in Medieval Europe" p. 131.

meal' could lead to the development of the disease.²²⁸ The fourteenth-century physician Peter Fagarola of Valencia gives a similar account in a letter to his sons in 1315, when he advises them to:

beware of eating milk and fish, or milk and wine, at the same meal, for milk and fish or milk and wine produce leprosy.²²⁹

Other authorities suggest that leprosy can be caused 'on account of a bad regimen' through 'excessive use of beef, flesh of oxen, lentils and all legumes'.²³⁰ These theories of dietary-induced leprosy came about because of the ways in which these foods were thought to affect the humoral composition of the body. The dietary causes of leprosy provide evidence of an understanding that the disease could be acquired without sin. However, Hildegard of Bingen's observation that leprosy caused by 'gluttony and drunkenness' was more difficult to cure than leprosy caused by 'unrestrained lust' provides evidence of a moral response to dietary-induced leprosy.²³¹

Physicians such as Guy de Chauliac were also known to connect diseases such as leprosy to divine causes, highlighting the overlap between religious and medical thinking at this time. For instance, Chauliac gives the following advice to physicians seeing a patient with leprosy:

in clepyng Goddes help, he schall conforte ham and saie þat this passioun or sekenesse is saluacioun of þe soule and noht to say the trouthe, for if leprouse men were reproued, it were a purgatorie to þe soule. And if þe world haue hem in hate, neuer-belatter God haue hem not in hate. 3e, but he loued Lazer, þe leprouse man, more þan oþer men.²³²

Here, Chauliac appears to suggest that lepers should be reassured that their condition is salvation of the soul, whether or not this is the case. Yet, he goes on to acknowledge the possibility that the disease genuinely could be a form of purgatory

²²⁸ Anglicus, *Gilbertus Anglicus*, p. 49.

²²⁹ As cited in: *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 503.

²³⁰ Theodric, *The Surgery of Theodric*. Volume Two, Books III & IV, ed. and trans. E. Campbell and J. Colton (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), p. 167.

²³¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegard of Bingen: On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from the Cause et Cure*, ed. M. Berger (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1999), p. 103

²³² Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 381.

for the soul, and explains the love God has for lepers above all men. Wallis has noted that leprosy 'lay at the intersection of complex cultural and religious responses' and medical responses, too, appear to form part of this intersection.²³³

Medical and Literary Approaches to Cure:

It is important not to be anachronistic in approaching medieval medical perceptions about curing leprosy. Rawcliffe has observed that:

the medieval concept of cure was far less certain than our own. Patients as well as pilgrims could often expect little more than *relative* improvement, a temporary remission of symptoms or the restoration of partial mobility.²³⁴

Different types of leprosy had different prognoses, in the *Lily of Medicine* from the fourteenth century, Bernard de Gordon writes of how:

Allopecia is lasse parylouse & lighter for to cure ate the bygynnyng. And leonine is ore light for to curye & his malice is more wexynge; and elefancia is longe or he come to his state & is most harde fore to curye.²³⁵

Similarly, *leonine* and *elephantine* leprosy were considered the most serious and harmful types of the disease by the physician Guy de Chauliac, who describes them as 'of þe worste mater' compared to *alopecian* and *tyrian* leprosy which he observes are 'softer and meker maters'.²³⁶ However, he also notes that leprosy 'may not forsothe be currede (i. healed)'.²³⁷ The physician John Bradmore observed that *leonine* leprosy 'was rarely or never healed', which acknowledges the possibility that it could be cured, even though this was unlikely.²³⁸ Theodric describes that 'once it [leprosy] has arrived it is never cured except by the aid of medicine'.²³⁹ Here, Theodric suggests a degree of available symptom relief to sufferers and seems to

²³³ *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 339.

²³⁴ Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, pp. 250-251.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²³⁶ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 383.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ As cited in: Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 210.

²³⁹ Theodric, *The Surgery of Theodric*, p. 167.

leave open the possibility of a full recovery, although he limits the reasons for cure specifically to medical intervention.

A large number of treatments were recommended in medieval leper hospitals, including medicine, blood-letting, dietary alterations, sexual abstinence, and bathing. Marcombe has noted that bathing in water with a mineral or sulphurous content was among one of the most popular recommended therapies.²⁴⁰ Being bathed or immersed in water was considered to be particularly beneficial to lepers, and in *The Surgery of Theodric* lepers are recommended to 'bathe in fresh water very often, and rub themselves vigorously with the meal of chickpeas or beans'.²⁴¹ In the twelfth century Hildegard of Bingen prescribes:

a bath and an unguent made of several herbs and menstrual blood as a remedy for the sort of leprosy which arises from excessive libido.²⁴²

Bathing in blood as a cure for leprosy can also be found in the anti-Semitic propaganda claiming that a Jewish physician advised King Richard I to bathe in the blood of infants in order to cure himself of the disease.²⁴³ The twelfth-to-thirteenth-century Scottish scholar Michael Scot is also claimed to have stated that:

the blood of dogs, and of infants two years old or under, when diffused through a bath of heated water, dispels the Leprosy without a doubt.²⁴⁴

Thus, there were clearly a number of different medieval sources that advocated bathing in blood specifically, even though there were variations between them.

In spite of possible treatments, perceptions of leprosy as a medically incurable disease are widely represented in medieval literary culture. In the *Golden Legend*,

²⁴⁰ Marcombe, *Leper Knights*, p. 137.

²⁴¹ Theodoric, *The Surgery of Theodric*, p. 172.

²⁴² As cited in: Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), p. 72.

²⁴³ Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 96.

²⁴⁴ As cited in: J. Y. Simpson, "On Leprosy and Leper Hospitals", *The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal: Exhibiting a Concise View of the Latest and Most Important Discoveries in Medicine, Surgery, and Pharmacy*, 56 (1841): p. 313.

the Emperor Constantine's leprosy is described as an 'incurable disease'.²⁴⁵ In drama, none of the lepers are cured by the aid of medicine: only the Emperor Constantine seeks medical help (but never takes it), and medical cures are mentioned but dismissed for the Emperor Tiberius. With only one exception, every leper I discuss in the drama is eventually cured through the power of belief in Christianity.

Miraculous cures themselves are sometimes portrayed as involving medical treatments: it is through the baptism of the Emperor Constantine that his leprosy is healed in *Bewnans Meriasek*. In a German narrative of Constantine's recovery, Konrad von Würzburg's thirteenth-century poem *Engelhard* describes the sacred healing properties of the water:

God alone is powerful and good enough to give water such
potency that it can purify the soul and appear to the body as
good as medicine.²⁴⁶

Although bathing is recommended by medieval medical authorities to help relieve the symptoms of leprosy, in medieval literary culture it is linked to baptism as a symbolic act that completely cures characters such as the Emperor Constantine. Baptism is also represented to miraculously cure leprosy in visual culture. For instance, in fig. 1, the leper Naaman cures his leprosy by bathing in the River Jordan: the same river in which Christ was baptised. These sources demonstrate religious perceptions of the curative effects of bathing combined with the healing abilities of faith and baptism, as well as the moral interpretation that the leprous body is unclean through sin.

²⁴⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 64.

²⁴⁶ As cited in: Brian Murdoch, *Adam's Grace: Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature*, trans. B. Murdoch (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), *Engelhard*, ll. 1604-1609, p. 114.

Figure 1: Naaman the Leper washes in the Jordan
15th Century, Flemish (MS Douce f.4, f. 007r) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Social and Religious Responses to Leprosy:

There seem to have been increasingly hostile attitudes towards lepers from the fourteenth century onwards, just as the disease was declining.²⁴⁷ Yet, in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery reflects a mixture of positive and negative social and religious responses towards people afflicted with leprosy. As Wallis has observed, the disease lay at the 'intersection of complex cultural and religious responses'.²⁴⁸ It is these conflicting cultural and religious responses that I shall now explore in order to evaluate how they interact with dramatic representations of leprosy and the significations of the leprous body.

²⁴⁷ *Medieval Medicine*, ed. Wallis, p. 339.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Positive Responses:

There were many who believed that God had chosen lepers to receive a sign of his divine grace. In addition to being models of penitential suffering, the physical manifestation of leprosy could be seen as a symbol of Christ's own suffering: this is reflected in the visual similarities between representations of leprous sores covering the body, and Christ as the Man of Sorrows covered with wounds symbolising the sins of mankind (see fig. 2). These similarities were developed in medieval visual culture to the extent that the leprous body became 'an intermediary to the body of Christ'.²⁴⁹ Even in texts such as Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Christ's body is specifically compared to the body of a leper after the scourging, since he was beaten until 'there was none semlynesse nor beutye in hym, and we helde him as foule as a leprose manne'.²⁵⁰

As the wounds inflicted on Christ's body were often associated with the sins of mankind, it is interesting to observe a similar interpretation applied to the leprous body. In Konrad von Würzburg's thirteenth-century courtly romance *Engelhard*, the leprous sores of the Emperor Constantine are referred to as being 'the spotting of sin'.²⁵¹ Thus, despite the positive significations that the leprous body could possess in its Christ-like suffering, his wounds from human sin evoke the perception that lepers were marred by their own sinfulness. This parallel reflects the ambiguous signification of the leprous body even in contexts where it is comparable to the body of Christ.

The parallel between Christ's body and the leprous body can be found in the Soane Hours, which contains a striking similarity shown between the baptism of Christ in fig. 3, and Naaman bathing in the River Jordan to cleanse his body of leprosy in fig. 4. These images once again connect Christ's body, the leprous body and sinfulness. In this instance, the visual parallels highlight that baptism is salvation, cleansing the body of sin. This connection is particularly significant as leprosy was itself associated with salvation as a form of purgatory for the soul – a connection

²⁴⁹ Jenna Ogden, "The Leprous Christ and the Christ-like Leper: The Leprous Body as an Intermediary to the Body of Christ in Late Medieval Art and Society" (MA diss., Cleveland State University, 2011), p. iii.

²⁵⁰ Nicholas Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (New York: Garland, 1992), p.171.

²⁵¹ As cited in: Murdoch, *Adam's Grace, Engelhard*, l. 1721, p. 114.

made even in medical texts such as Chauliac's *Cirurgie*.

There were also many texts that associated Christ or God with lepers. In the didactic story of 'Theobald and the Leper' from a popular fifteenth-century translation of *An Alphabet of Tales*, Theobald goes into a leper's house to wash his feet and give him alms, but instead finds almighty God in the clothes of the leper:

he fand not þe layzer, bod Almyghti God in þe layser clothing,
and he did him serves as he was wunte to do; and in his harte he
felid a grete swetnes.²⁵²

God's appearance as a leper in the text highlights medieval spiritual ideas connecting the suffering of the leper with that of Christ. The text also demonstrates the loving devotion that Theobald has for God, which is paralleled through the love and charity that Theobald intends to give to the leper. Another positive response to the leper can be found in the example of a fifteenth-century sermon on humility, translated from Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Miraculorum*:

A bysschop in fraunce wesschyde leprys feet. The bysschop mette
be the weye a lepre. The bysschop kyssed him. The lepre seyde:
"Bysschop, for thi lownes [humility], wye wyth thi tunge oute
of my nase the snevyl that hangyth ther-inne, for I may noht
suffere no lynen cloth towche it, for it is so sore." The bysschop
wyth his tunge lykked it out lowly [humbly]. And in his lykkynge,
sodeynly out of the leprys nose fel a precyous ston in-to the
byschopys mowth, schynyng bryht & swete smellynge. & forth-
wyth, in the syht of the bysschop, the lepre stye up [ascended]
to heven.²⁵³

This text pays particular attention to both the senses of the leper and the bishop's sense-based contact of him. It was thought that the senses could provide a union with God, particularly through the mouth.²⁵⁴ It is through the bishop's intimate physical contact with the leper using his mouth that he is rewarded with a 'precyous ston' from the leper's nose. Thus, the bishop's humility and kindness towards the leper is rewarded through his spiritual experience.

²⁵² *An Alphabet of Tales*, ed. Banks, Part II, Tale 439, ll. 5-7, pp. 301-302.

²⁵³ *Jacob's Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, ed. Arthur Brandeis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1900), p. 247.

²⁵⁴ Caroline Walker-Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), p. 133.

There was also a belief that in death, lepers would go directly to heaven for the purgatorial suffering they had already endured, which was another reason why the care of lepers and charitable acts towards them became so popular. These positive social responses to lepers all interpret the physical suffering of the leprous body as a form of Christian devotion: by enduring purgatory on earth, suffering in *imitatio Christi*, or as a blessing from God. Yet, it is especially through the multivalent symbol of Christ's body that the signification of the leprous body becomes ambiguous, for the interpretation of Christ's wounds as symbols of human sin was also applied to lepers in negative social responses.

Negative Responses:

Leprosy was associated with a number of specific sins including pride, envy, and lechery. Rawcliffe has noted how the physical deformities leprosy produced, in addition to the fear it created, made it seem an appropriate punishment for concupiscence and pride 'which in turn, were invariably represented as leprosy or cancer of the soul'.²⁵⁵ In particular, Christian notions of moral impairment and its association with sickness informed medieval perceptions of the diseased body.²⁵⁶ In the sixth century, the early medieval writer Gregory of Tours associated the disease with heresy specifically, for in the *History of the Franks*, he details how:

Like some new Constantine he [Sigamber] stepped forward to the baptismal pool, ready to wash away the sores of his old leprosy and to be cleansed in flowing water from the sordid stains which he had borne so long. As he advanced for his baptism, the holy man of God addressed him in these pregnant words: 'Bow your head in meekness, Sigamber. Worship what you have burnt, burn what you have been wont to worship'.²⁵⁷

In this text, not only does leprosy signify sin, but baptism once again heals the body and the soul – thus demonstrating ideas about the interrelation of the two. Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas also conjectured that 'leprosy was frequently a

²⁵⁵ Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. 14.

²⁵⁶ Jennifer Vaught, "Introduction: Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in Medieval and Early Modern England", in: *Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 5.

²⁵⁷ Gregory of Tours, *A History of The Franks*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Group, 1974), Book II: 31, p. 144.

result of sin²⁵⁸ in his *Summa Theologica*, whereas St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* was more subtle in his opinion that:

one can read human bodies, healthy or not, as signs leading to wisdom about sacred or sacrilegious matters.²⁵⁹

Here, St. Augustine suggests that the health or sickness of the body is itself a signifier of moral and spiritual condition. In fact, Rawcliffe has noted that the majority of medieval theologians took an unsympathetic view of leprosy, by either portraying the condition as a symbol of the individual sufferer's moral decay, or a physiological manifestation of wickedness on the part of the sufferer or their parents.²⁶⁰ This is indicative of the social perception that leprosy could be caused by inherited sin as well as personal sinfulness.

The association of the disease with personal sinfulness is something that can be seen in late-medieval responses. Despite her compassion for lepers, Margery Kempe also suggests that leprosy would be a justified punishment for sexual transgressions. Margery advises and warns her son to:

kepe thi body klene at the lest fro womanys feleschep tyl thu take a wyfe aftyr the lawe of the Chirche. And, yf thu do not, I pray God chastise the and ponysch the therfor.²⁶¹

However, she goes on to comment that her son 'fel into the synne of letchery'²⁶² and was subsequently afflicted with an illness similar to leprosy, for:

Sone aftyr hys colowr chawngyd, hys face wex ful of whelys and bloberys as it had ben a lepyr.²⁶³

Having prayed for God to punish acts of sexual transgression committed by her son, Margery directly attributes his physical affliction to his immoral behaviour.

²⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (2013), <<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=YiJCBAQAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Summa+Theologica&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KxNdVdijKeHd7gasjoHgCg&ved=0CFQQ6AEwBzgU#v=onepage&q&f=false>> Part I-II, Fifth Article, Q. 102, Fifth Article, Reply to Objection 7.

²⁵⁹ Vaught, "Introduction: Rhetorics of Bodily Disease" p. 5.

²⁶⁰ Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society*, p. 14.

²⁶¹ Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book 2, Chapter 1, ll. 22-24.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, ll. 26-27.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, ll. 27-28.

Lepers were also perceived as the 'living dead'. Consequently, many people afflicted with the disease had ceremonies performed in order to officiate their 'death' and removal from the world. Brody has observed that these ceremonies differed little from the Office of the Dead 'for in principle the leper was no longer one of the living'.²⁶⁴ The status of lepers as the living dead is noteworthy since the cure and conversion of lepers when it is shown in literature and drama can mark new life through absolution, and physical and spiritual renewal.

Figure 2: Man of Sorrows (*Imago Pietatis*)
15th Century, English (Stained Glass) Long Melford Church, Suffolk



²⁶⁴ Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, p. 65.

Figure 3: Baptism of Christ

16th Century, Flemish (Soane Hours, MS 4, f. 27v) Soane Museum, London



Figure 4: Cleansing of Naaman

16th Century, Flemish (Soane Hours, MS 4, f. 28r) Soane Museum, London



Physical Characteristics of Medieval Leprosy:

It is essential to consider descriptions and representations of the physical manifestations of leprosy in order to understand how it may have been presented in the performances of medieval drama. These accounts are also useful in understanding the multivalent significations of the disease.

On the physical characteristics of leprosy, Bartholomew Anglicus writes in the thirteenth century that:

the flesh is notably corrupt, the shape is changed, the eyen become round, the eyelids are revelled, the sight sparkleth, the nostrils are straited and revelled and shrunk ... swelling groweth in the body, and many small botches and welks hard and round, in the legs and in the utter parts.²⁶⁵

Gilbertus Anglicus made similar observations in the same century, although he is more judgemental about the physical appearance of the disease in his reflection that the greasiness of a leper's skin is 'another sign of evil omen'.²⁶⁶ In a discussion of the origins of the word *lepra*, Guy de Chauliac explains:

it is saide of þe worde lupus, a wolfe, for it devoureþ alle þe membres as a wolf doth. It roteth forsoþe alle þe memberes as a cancrouse wolf.²⁶⁷

Here, Guy de Chauliac compares the devastating effects of leprosy upon the flesh to being ravaged by a wolf. This corruption of the flesh could be associated with the corruption of the soul, which is one of the reasons that the leprous body was equated with sin. Significantly, the perception of the ugliness of leprosy's physical manifestation is used in conjunction with the suggestion of sin and immorality in a homily from the fourteenth century:

For riht als leper mas bodi
Ugli, and lathe, and unherly,
Sua mas the filth of licheri
The sawel ful lath, gastelye,

²⁶⁵ Bartholomew Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things* in: *Source Book of Medical History*, ed. Logan Clendening (1942; repr. Canada: General Publishing Company, 1960), p. 87.

²⁶⁶ Anglicus, *Gilbertus Anglicus, Medicine of the Thirteenth Century*, p. 5.

²⁶⁷ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 378.

And the bolning of prive pride
Es leper, that na man mai hide.²⁶⁸

This evidence suggests that leprosy and its ensuing physical ugliness could be perceived as the characteristics of the leper's soul.

Medieval visual culture also provides evidence of the physical manifestations of leprosy and perceptions of lepers. Leprous sores, marked with spotting upon the face and body, were the most popular way of depicting the disease. For instance, the lepers portrayed in fig. 5 have spotted faces, and the disease could also be depicted with these spots or markings covering the entire body, as in fig. 6. Many images of lepers appear in a religious context, with figs. 7 and 8 depicting the miraculous healing of lepers at the hands of Christ: a popular theme in medieval manuscript paintings. This supports the idea of leprosy being a disease only curable by God. Images such as these could therefore have resulted in an association between redemption and the leprous body, or otherwise connect its miraculous cure to spiritual transformation.

This leads us to consider what leprosy may have looked like in medieval dramatic performances. The British Library's manuscripts Additional MSS 89066/1 and 89066/2 contain illustrations alongside the play-text of the fifteenth-century French play *Mystère de la Vengeance*. This play has a number of similarities with the *Death of Pilate* from the Cornish *Ordinalia*, although it is the Emperor Vespasian (rather than Tiberius Caesar) who is afflicted with leprosy. In this manuscript, the leprosy of the Emperor Vespasian is depicted in fig. 9 with spots all over his body, suggesting the relevance of this typical representation of leprosy in medieval visual culture to drama.

Another image relevant to the portrayal of leprosy in drama can be found in fig. 10, from the *Holkham Bible Picture Book*. This depicts the legend of the Smith who was unable to make the nails for Christ's crucifixion because of the miraculous affliction of his hands. Although there are many accounts of this narrative, such as the Middle English poem the *Northern Passion* and the Middle Cornish poem *Pascon agan Arluth* (Passion of our Lord), the Smith is specifically afflicted with leprosy in

²⁶⁸ As cited in: Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society*, p. 14.

the *Passio Christi* [PC], a biblical play from the late-fourteenth century. Like other lepers, the Smith's afflicted hand is depicted with spots (on the far left of the image).

Despite the many physical characteristics of leprosy noted above, its individual characteristics are rarely mentioned in medieval play-texts. The only examples occur in the description that the hands of the Smith are 'sore' (PC, l. 2677)²⁶⁹ with his skin 'broken and peeled' (PC, l. 2687), and in the Chester *Corvisors'* Play [Ch. CP] Simon the Leper is described to have been 'fowle and mesell' (Ch. CP, l. 18).²⁷⁰ Other than this, the characteristic ugliness of the disease is only mentioned in reference to the Emperor Constantine and the First Leper in the text of *Bewnans Meriasek*. The stage directions of *Bewnans Meriasek* indicate the use of a mask for the Emperor Constantine, which suggests that Constantine's facial features were physically distorted in the portrayal of the disease. However, there is no information on what this mask may have looked like. The staging possibilities of the acquisition, appearance, and cure of leprosy will be considered during my discussion of the plays.

Clothing was another possible physical identifier of lepers. The fifteenth-century image of fig. 11 from an English manuscript depicts a leper wearing an ankle-length tunic, a cloak with a hood, and a hat. Although there were regional variations on the uniform of lepers, similar items of clothing can also be observed in fig. 12 from a fifteenth-century register of alms from Nuremberg. This image depicts a leper with an ankle-length tunic, gloves, a cloak with a hood, and a hat. However, whilst tunics, in particular, were associated with lepers these clothes could also be given out to beggars. In both fig. 11 and fig. 12, the faces of the lepers are at least partially concealed through the use of hooded cloaks, and could have been further concealed with their hats. Skin could also be concealed under gloves, as in fig. 12. Attire such as this could have been used for the First and Second Leper in the performance of *Bewnans Meriasek*, but as leprosy was becoming increasingly rare in the late-medieval period, this may be less likely.

²⁶⁹ *Passio Domini Nostri*, in: *The Ancient Cornish Drama Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Edwin Norris (1859; repr. Milton Keynes: British Library, n.d.) pp. 435. All further references are to this edition. Please note the *Passio Domini Nostri* is another name for the *Passio Christi*.

²⁷⁰ *The Corvisors' Play*, in: *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R. Lumiansky and D. Mills (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 251. All further references are to this edition.

Figure 5: A Praying Leper in Stained Glass
15th Century, English (Stained Glass, St. William Window) York Minster, York



Figure 6: St. Elizabeth of Thuringia and the Patients
13th Century, French (The Picture-Book of Madame Mariec, BNF NAL 16251, f. 103v)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



Figure 7: Christ Heals a Leper

14th Century, Venetian (MS Canon. Misc. 476, f. 066r) Bodleian Library, Oxford



Figure 8: Christ Healing a Leper

14th Century, French (Bible Historiale, MMW 10 B 23, f. 470 v)
Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag



Figure 9: Vespasian afflicted with Leprosy
15th Century, French (Add. MS 89066/1, f. 61v) British Library, London



Figure 10: The Afflicted Hand of the Smith (Left)
14th Century, English (Holkham Bible Picture Book, Add. MS 47682, f. 31r)
British Library, London



Figure 11: A Leper with a Bell

15th Century, English (MS Landsdowne 451, f. 127) British Library, London



Figure 12: Wounded Christ Beside a Leper

15th Century, German (Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, StadtAN A21/4° Nr. 21/I) St. Sebald's Church, Nuremberg



2) Plays

The play-texts I examine in this chapter each concern the signification of the leprous body. To my knowledge, these characters are the only extant lepers in late-medieval English and Cornish drama. With the exception of Simon the Leper (who is only ever described as a former leper), all of these characters exist in two Middle Cornish play-texts: *Bewnans Meriasek* and the *Ordinalia*. The significations of the disease vary considerably within and between these texts.

In plays discussed in this chapter, there is variation in the acquisition of leprosy and the reasons for its acquisition; the cure of leprosy, and the approaches to its cure; the physical characteristics of leprosy, and the responses it evokes. Leprosy also has 'positive', 'negative' and 'neutral' significations in medieval drama. I use these categories to define the signification of leprosy in relation to the moral and spiritual condition of the character. The very existence of these different categories is an indication of how differently the disease is portrayed in addition to its various functions throughout medieval drama.

The ambiguous medical, cultural and religious construction of leprosy helps to explain why the disease is used so variously in medieval drama. Although leprosy does not necessarily define the moral and spiritual conditions of each character, it is always used either according to the leper's relationship with Christianity, or in their promotion of the faith.

Even though two of the plays feature Roman Emperors who are afflicted with leprosy but cured upon conversion to Christianity, the signification of the disease varies considerably between these characters. In *Bewnans Meriasek*, the leprosy of the Emperor Constantine is acquired as a divine punishment for his immorality, whereas in the *Ordinalia*, the Emperor Tiberius Caesar's leprosy is never linked to either his moral condition or non-Christianity. Both Tiberius Caesar and Constantine are portrayed as powerful, ruthless and violent emperors. But whereas Constantine's ruthless violence is a specific aspect of his immorality, Tiberius' violence occurs after his cure and conversion, in avenging the death of Christ. It is this difference between the characters that defines the contrasting significations of their shared disease.

In addition to the explicitly negative signification of Constantine's leprosy, the text of *Bewnans Meriasek* also includes a much more neutral signification of the disease as two lepers travel to the Bishop Meriasek, seeking a cure for their affliction. The leprosy of these characters does not reflect on their moral and spiritual conditions: its function is to be miraculously healed, demonstrating the power of God, as observed for the disability of the Blind Man in the Chester *Glovers' Play*. Simon the Leper, who is only ever described as a former leper, provides a similar example in the Chester *Corvisors' Play*. In contrast to the neutral signification of the Emperor Tiberius' leprosy in the *Ordinalia*, within the same play-text the disease is explicitly positive in the body of the Smith. This leprosy, which is a divine gift, is also unique in the corpus of medieval English and Cornish drama for remaining uncured.

Starting with the positive signification of leprosy, I discuss the divine acquisition of leprosy by the Smith in the *Passio Christi*. As the Smith is the only character whose leprosy is explicitly positive, this raises the question of how his Christian beliefs are represented in relation to his afflicted body. It is also valuable to consider how he reflects positive responses to the disease in medieval culture.

In my section on negative leprosy, I explore how leprosy is represented as a divine punishment for the Emperor Constantine in *Bewnans Meriasek*. As the Emperor is only cured upon his baptism, his changing relationship with Christianity is also essential to consider in this play.

The three final plays I discuss all concern the neutral signification of leprosy. First, I discuss the Emperor Tiberius in the Cornish *Ordinalia*, who begins the play already stricken with leprosy. Despite his identity as a potential opponent of Christianity, Tiberius puts his faith in Christianity in his search for a cure from the onset of the play. This makes the Emperor Tiberius an interesting character to compare with the Emperor Constantine, since the signification of their leprosy is so different despite their similarities as non-Christian Roman Emperors. I then go on to examine the healing miracles of the Bishop Meriasek as the First Leper and Second Leper are cured of their disease in *Bewnans Meriasek*. Finally, I discuss Simon the Leper in the Chester *Corvisors' Play*, even though the character only briefly reflects

on his former leprosy. The neutral leprosy of each of these characters reflects on the people that helped them to be miraculously cured, the Bishop Meriasek and Christ respectively. For this reason, these plays are important in understanding the absent signification of leprosy, the contrasting uses of the disease within the same play-text or collection of plays, and the inconsistent use of the disease within medieval drama overall.

Positive Leprosy

‘Smith the Leper’ in the *Passio Christi*:

The *Passio Christi* is the second of three Middle Cornish plays that together form the *Ordinalia*. The play originates from the late fourteenth century but survives in a single fifteenth-century manuscript.²⁷¹ The brief episode including the role of ‘Smith the Leper’ in the *Passio Christi* occurs prior to the crucifixion of Christ.²⁷²

Longworth and Murdoch both refer to the Smith of the *Passio Christi* as ‘Smith the Leper’.²⁷³ However, in Norris’ 1859 English translation of the play-text, the term ‘leprosy’ is never mentioned specifically. In the original Middle Cornish, as the Smith describes his suffering he uses the word *claf*, which Norris translates as ‘sore’. However, a number of more recent scholars, including Mills, have translated this word as ‘leprous’. In his recent linguistic study of Middle Cornish, Mills translates the expression ‘thulef claf’ (*PC*, l. 2698) taken directly from this section of the play, as ‘a pair of leprous hands’.²⁷⁴ Thus, following Longworth, Murdoch and Mills (among others), this chapter assumes that the Smith in the *Passio Christi* is afflicted with

²⁷¹ See: Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian, “The Cornish Ordinalia”, in: *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*, eds. Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2013), p. 283.

²⁷² This section occurs from lines 2669-2708.

²⁷³ See: Robert Longworth, *The Cornish Ordinalia: Religion and Dramaturgy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 67. See also: Brian Murdoch, *Cornish Literature* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer 1993), p. 33.

²⁷⁴ Jon Mills, “Computer-assisted Lemmatisation of a Cornish Text Corpus for Lexicographical Purposes” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2002), p. 311.

leprosy.²⁷⁵ This translation is supported by the description of the Smith's hands affected by 'a great disease' in the *Pascon agan Arluth* (The Passion of Our Lord) from the fourteenth century, which contains a similar version of the episode with the Smith.²⁷⁶ The narrative of the Smith's leprosy is valuable since he is the only character whose acquisition of leprosy is a positive symbol from its onset and the story does not record its cure. Another similar version of this episode can be found in the thirteenth-century *Northern Passion*.

Leprosy and Love of Christ:

The divinely acquired leprosy of the Smith is particularly interesting due to the disease's symbolic function of demonstrating his empathy for Christ's crucifixion wounds. The Smith's brief role in the *Passio Christi* begins when the Torturers of Christ seek out his trade in order to procure three nails for the crucifixion. As the Fourth Executioner approaches the Smith, he asks him:

Are there three great spikes with thee made?
Tell me, as thou lovest me;
For fastening the false prophet,
Called Jesus, to the wood of the cross.
If there are none, go at once and make them
(*PC*, ll. 2670-2674).²⁷⁷

However, the Smith responds that he is unable to make any nails because both of his hands have become afflicted with leprosy:

I cannot, on my truth,

²⁷⁵ In Whitley Stokes' 1872 translation of *Bewnans Meriasek*, the Middle Cornish word *claff* is translated as "leprosy" in relation to the Emperor Constantine. This same spelling, *claff*, is also found in the Middle Cornish poem *Pascon agan Arluth*. However, in Stokes' 1861 translation of this poem, the word *claff* is translated as "sick" and "sore" in relation to the Smith, even though his affliction is described as being "a great disease". Thus, it is of interest that Stokes translates *claff* to mean "sick", "sore" and "leprous", since Norris translates *claf* as "sore" in the *Passio Christi*. This suggests that in Middle Cornish both *claf* and *claff* could be used to mean "sick", "sore" and "leprous", just as *claf* continues to mean today in Welsh. See: *Beumans Meriasek: The Life of Saint Meriasek, Bishop and Confessor*, ed. Whitley Stokes (London: Trübner and Co., 1872), p. 80. See also: *Pascon Agan Arluth: The Passion of Our Lord*, ed. Whitley Stokes (London: The Philological Society 1861), p. 49. See also: "claf", *A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (2014), <<http://geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html?claf>>

²⁷⁶ *Pascon Agan Arluth: The Passion of Our Lord*, ed. Whitley Stokes (London: The Philological Society 1861), p. 49.

²⁷⁷ The edition is identified in footnote 269.

Make any nails for you,
For my hands are so sore [leprous],
I cannot handle any tool
(*PC*, ll. 2675-2678).

There is no evidence, either in the stage directions or in records of drama that suggest how the Smith's acquisition of leprosy could have been physically performed. It is possible that the actor could have had skin or gloves already painted to resemble leprosy, but concealed from the audience until he presents his hands, or else that the actor puts on such a pair of gloves before this action.

The stark physical change in the condition of the Smith's hands is highlighted by his wife, who responds to his condition with scepticism, accusing him: 'Thou wilt tell a very lie' (*PC*, l. 2679), pointing out that:

When thou gottest up this day morning,
Certainly sound were their sinews
(*PC*, ll. 2680-2681).

A similar line can be found in the *Pascon agan Arluth*, for the Smith's wife remarks: 'When thou wentest out to-day, no illness had taken thee'.²⁷⁸ Consequently, she demands him to: 'Shew them from under thy cloak' (*PC*, l. 2682). As the Smith presents his hands in proof, he describes that:

There is no skin upon them
Which is not broken and peeled
(*PC*, ll. 2686-2687).

These details (which appear to correlate with descriptions of *elephantic* leprosy) may provide evidence of the noticeable physical manifestation of the disease in dramatic performance, just as it appears in the *Holkham Bible Picture Book* in fig. 10. In support of this possibility, it is striking that no such description is found in the *Pascon agan Arluth*, despite the similarities between the texts. Since *elephantic* leprosy is the most malign and progressive form of the disease, this serious form of leprosy could have been used as the strongest signifier of the condition – conveying the physical damage and impairment to the Smith's hands with more dramatic impact

²⁷⁸ *Pascon Agan Arluth*, ed. Stokes, p. 49.

than the leper spots commonly used in medieval visual culture. The fact that the Smith's inability to manufacture the nails is not challenged may be further proof of the physical appearance of the leprosy as a serious, incurable condition.

In the text of the thirteenth-century *Northern Passion*, the Smith's divine affliction is received upon placing them close to his heart: 'In hys bosom he pute hys hond / And seyde he hurte it with a brond'.²⁷⁹ This suggests a further possible staging action, which would have to occur before he reveals his hands from under his cloak, following this demand from his wife. However, it is also possible that, as in the *Pascon agan Arluth*, the Torturers and the Smith's wife see disease upon his hands, even though they appear normal: 'On them they saw disease, although there was not any'.²⁸⁰ This performance would clearly display the miraculous nature of the affliction before the audience. Since the disease is not visible in this text, this may support Stokes' translation of *claf* as 'sore' rather than 'leprous' – it does not matter exactly *which* disease the Smith has, just that he *is* diseased. In the *Passio Christi*, however, there *are* specific descriptions of the physical appearance of the disease, and not representing the affliction visibly would detract from the symbolic value of the leprosy, in addition to the parallel drawn between the Smith's body and the body of Christ.

It is significant that in the *Northern Passion* the Smith's hands receive their affliction after he places them close to his heart. This not only provides evidence of his impaired hands signifying his love for God, but also creates a parallel with Christ's crucified body with his heart wound signifying his own love for mankind. This version of the episode suggests the positive signification of the affliction and its reflection of the Smith's love for Christ in similar narratives.

In the *Passio Christi*, it is particularly striking that the Smith's leprosy is a divine gift. This is specifically suggested in the text since the Smith's wife interprets

²⁷⁹ *The Northern Passion, Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffleton-codex-ashmole-61-northern-passion>> ll. 1396-1397.

²⁸⁰ *Pascon Agan Arluth*, ed. Stokes, p. 49.

his contraction of leprosy as the trickery of an idolatrous god. Consequently, she scolds her husband:

O idle fellow, God give thee woe!
Thau hast worshipped, on some occasion,
The false knave.
They were sound to-day, by my faith;
Some jugglery he has done to him
Very really.
(*PC*, ll. 2691-2696).

This noteworthy response presents an example of leprosy being associated with heresy, although ironically, in this instance, heresy towards an idolatrous god. After this accusation of worshipping Christ, the Smith confesses his devotion:

O Jesus, be thou worshipped;
To be God and man likewise,
Now I know well.
Happy is he who believes on him
(*PC*, ll. 2703-2706).

Here, the Smith emphasises his new-found happiness in his religious devotion. As a divine gift, the leprosy of the Smith signifies his moral virtue as well as his love and faith in Christ, thus associating the disease with exemplary religious devotion. In addition to his physical transformation through his divine gift of leprosy, the Smith has also experienced a devotional transformation in openly declaring his love for Christ and interacting with the narrative of his crucifixion.

It is important that the Smith's hands, rather than his entire body, are afflicted with leprosy, as Christ endures wounds to both his hands. This significance is heightened by his acquisition of leprosy following his reluctance to manufacture the very nails that would cause Christ this parallel affliction. The condition is therefore symbolic of the Smith's empathy for Christ in his suffering, thus demonstrating a parallel between the leprous body and the body of Christ. Interestingly, this parallel to Christ appears in a context that is not related to sin.

Having confessed his faith, the stage directions indicate that: [s.d. The Smith withdraws from them] (*PC*, aft. l. 2708) and the character has no further role in this episode. As curing the Smith's hands would mean that he is physically capable of

manufacturing the nails, this may explain why the Smith is not cured of his leprosy during the play. The Smith reverses the standard pattern of medieval drama, by being miraculously inflicted with, rather than cured of, leprosy. The positive signification of leprosy conforms to the social responses it elicited, including the idea that lepers were chosen by God for their divine grace. Despite the potentially negative medical, cultural and religious responses to leprosy, the Smith's leprous hands portray the power of belief in Christianity.

Conclusion to Positive Leprosy:

In conclusion, the Smith's affliction with leprosy is clearly connected with his belief in Christianity. The condition, which appears as physical proof of his love for Christ, also allows him to understand the pain of Christ's crucifixion wounds. Thus, through the divine gift of leprosy the Smith can experience an affective identification with Christ, strengthening his own devotion. Although the dramatic episode is only brief, the Smith's mounting faith in Christianity is apparent: from revealing his 'heretical' beliefs to his wife to declaring his understanding of the joy of Christian belief. It is clear that whilst leprosy has a positive signification in the play, the dramatist is also aware that it could be interpreted as the trickery of an idolatrous god and thus a symbol of heresy *as well as* a divine gift. This is further proof that the condition is defined in relation to the spiritual condition of the individual. The lack of focus on the healing or cure of the Smith's hands also suggests that leprosy is being used for its symbolic significance.

Negative Leprosy

The Leprosy of the Emperor Constantine in *Bewnans Meriasek*:

Bewnans Meriasek [BM] is a Middle Cornish play originating from Camborne and composed in 1504.²⁸¹ Concerning the life of the Cornish Saint Meriasek, the play covers his early schooling; his many miracles healing the disabled, impaired and

²⁸¹ The Middle Cornish play *Bewnans Meriasek* is spelt in a number of various ways including *Beunans Meriasek* and *Beumans Meriasek*. Although the edition used in this thesis takes the spelling *Beumans Meriasek*, I refer to it as *Bewnans Meriasek* throughout in line with the contemporary spelling of this word for the play-text *Bewnans Ke*.

diseased; his later bishopric and eventual death. The play also features a section that details the legend of Pope Sylvester and his healing of the Emperor Constantine's leprosy.²⁸²

Constantine is an important figure within the history of Christianity, as the first Christian Roman Emperor, and for his influence in the spread of the faith throughout the Roman Empire. Resnick has noted that narratives of Constantine's leprosy became well established in the Middle Ages despite the lack of any historical accounts contemporary with Constantine that refer to his leprosy.²⁸³ This suggests that medieval authors may have used contemporary constructions of leprosy as a means of exploring their own religiously inflected concerns. In the text of *Bewnans Meriasek* the Emperor Constantine is afflicted with leprosy as a divine punishment following his persecution of Christians. In his desperation for a cure, he is advised to bathe in the blood of thousands of infants and arranges for their slaughter accordingly. But through his suffering the Emperor Constantine begins to question his morality, and is moved to forgo his method of cure, offering mercy to the infants and their mothers, eventually being prepared to sacrifice his life for theirs. This moral development of the Emperor allows us to consider the changing signification of his leprosy. Since he is finally cured of his disease upon his baptism this section of *Bewnans Meriasek* is also a valuable source to explore the significations of the leprous body in the context of faith in Christianity.

Divine Punishment and The Leprosy of Constantine:

The narrative of Constantine's contraction and cure of leprosy begins in Rome. In his opening lines, Constantine boasts of his power as 'a body without peer' (*BM*, l. 1153)²⁸⁴ that has 'slain many hundreds' (*BM*, l. 1167) and expresses his intention to kill even more people in the names of Mahound and Sol.²⁸⁵ After this initial

²⁸² This healing episode occurs over lines 1153-1865.

²⁸³ Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, pp. 95-96.

²⁸⁴ *Beumans Meriasek: The Life of Saint Meriasek, Bishop and Confessor*, ed. Whitley Stokes (London: Trübner and Co., 1872), p. 65. All further references are to this edition.

²⁸⁵ Mahound (Mohammed) and Sol are sacred figures from Islam and Paganism respectively. Although Mohammed is a sacred figure from Islam and Constantine was a pagan prior to his conversion to Christianity, in the medieval period it was not unusual for non-Christians to be associated with the worship of a number of different prophets, gods, and demons with little or no regard to the practice of the religions concerned.

characterisation of the Emperor's moral impairment caused by his spiritual alterity, he gathers his torturers and knights in order to continue to persecute the Christians:

Welcome, knights, everyone!
Need is it for you to go on
To chastise the Christians
Over all the kingdoms of Rome hence.

All that believe in Mary's Son
By torment slay them.
Never fear damnation.
I will support you ever
(*BM*, ll. 1178-1185).

Having displayed his pride, arrogance and heresy, Constantine's requirement that Christians be persecuted throughout the Roman Empire emphasises his cruelty. These qualities all convey the 'moral leprosy' of Constantine and the negative significations of his leprous condition once he is divinely afflicted.

The morally abhorrent behaviour of the Emperor is not just suggested in his desire to persecute, but demonstrated in the physical dramatisation of the martyrdom of two devout Christians: the Earl, and a Doctor in the Faith. Importantly, in the face of the threat posed against them by Constantine's Torturers, the Christians insist that they will not deny their faith:

For dread of Constantine
Or of tortures at any time
We will not deny Jesu
(*BM*, ll. 1222-1224).

This show of courage and strength in devotion to Christianity highlights Constantine's lack of power and delusions of grandeur. After the martyrdom of the Earl and the Doctor, the action turns to Christ in heaven with the Angels Michael and Gabriel, who reflect upon their martyred souls. A bolt of lightning strikes following this brief scene in heaven, which suggests that Christ administers Constantine's divine punishment as a direct response to the martyrdom of the Earl and the Doctor. The play specifically connects the fallen bodies of the martyrs, the lightning strike and the infliction of leprosy, for each event employs the Middle Cornish word for

‘fallen’, *cothys*, thus highlighting the cause and administration of Constantine’s divine punishment.²⁸⁶

As the action returns to Constantine, the stage directions indicate that there should be [s.d. A mask ready upon Constantine’s face] (*BM*, aft. I. 1347). The use of a mask in order to portray Constantine’s leprosy is an indication of the physical performance of the disease. The logistical difficulties of using body paint to represent the suddenly-imposed *and* suddenly-relieved leper spots supports the reason for using a mask, which would also allow his facial features to be physically distorted in the portrayal of the disease. Since the mask portrays how suddenly the leprosy strikes him, it allows the audience to connect it to his morally abhorrent actions with the Christians and the strike of lightning. Through such a drastic transformation, Constantine’s physically distorted appearance is a clear signification of his immorality. Notably, as Constantine reflects upon his affliction, he refers specifically to his ugliness:

I am become a leper,
As every one says, ugly,
No one loves to see my face
(*BM*, ll. 1359-1361).

Constantine’s ugliness is another aspect of the disease that reflects his immoral actions towards the Christians, thus portraying his moral ugliness through his appearance. In his own response to his leprosy, he speculates on whether it is a form of punishment. His declaration that ‘There is leprosy on me / Fallen and I know not how’ (*BM*, ll. 1356-1357) is followed by the beginning of his moral awakening as he reflects upon his actions:

Ah, I have been overcruel
To Christians, I believe
(*BM*, ll. 1364-1365).

In the *Golden Legend*, which was a source used in the composition of the play, Constantine’s leprosy is directly attributed to his persecution of Christians:

²⁸⁶ See: *cothys* under “cotha”, in: *Archæologia Cornu-Britannica*, ed. William Pryce (Sherborne: W. Cruttwell, 1790), p. 84.

The emperor himself, in punishment for his tyrannical persecution, fell victim to the incurable disease of leprosy.²⁸⁷

Even as a pagan, in *Bewnans Meriasek* Constantine understands that his leprosy might be a divine punishment for his offences against Christianity, thus portraying the character beginning to acknowledge the validity of the religion. Whilst Constantine's leprosy symbolises his moral and spiritual impairment, it is important that his first lines of speech following his acquisition of the disease condemns the Torturers:

Go home, my soldiers,
The Devil to remember you!
(*BM*, ll. 1354-1355).

This suggests not only the beginning of his moral awakening and his potential for redemption, but also the necessity of his leprosy as a means to his atonement and salvation.

Cruelty to Children and the Search for a Cure:

Constantine's search for a cure reflects medieval approaches towards curing the disease. He sends for both religious and medical help, commanding the Second Messenger to: 'Fetch to me the Bishop here, / And the great Doctor, likewise' (*BM*, ll. 1379-1380) in order to ascertain whether there is any aid for his sickness. Turning towards both religious and medical authorities reflects the mixed responses towards the limited chance of a cure.

Yet, the treatments offered by these authorities suggest negative views of the medicine and religion of the Roman Empire in its non-Christian alterity. The Doctor negotiates for a reward, to which the Emperor promises:

Heal me and thou shalt have better
Ever in thy life.
I will make thee a high prelate
(*BM*, ll. 1466-1468).

²⁸⁷ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.64.

The Doctor, with the support of the Bishop, then advises the Emperor that:

If you were washed in pure blood
You would be healed fair
(*BM*, ll. 1496-1497).

Constantine agrees, and emphasises his merciless desperation for a cure as he commands them to 'Spare ye not a beast in this world / If it can be found' (*BM*, ll. 1502-1503). It soon emerges that the blood will come from three thousand children, rather than any beast, for the Bishop explains that the pure blood of children 'excels every salve' (*BM*, l. 1511). Since this barbarous cure comes at the suggestion of pagan religious authorities, this implies that its moral atrocity can be blamed upon heresy and non-Christian alterity. The exact method of cure, bathing in blood, interestingly echoes medieval ideas about the cure of leprosy such as Hildegard of Bingen and Michael Scot recommending baths of menstrual and animal blood. But the anti-Semitic propaganda surrounding King Richard I's affliction with the disease provides evidence of negative cultural perceptions of using the blood of infants as a cure. Child blood sacrifice was not only a human taboo, but was strongly connected to Jewish moral and spiritual alterity, so that revulsion to the barbarity of the cure would have been reinforced at the time of the play's composition.

The intention to murder the children shows obvious similarities with Herod's Massacre of the Innocents. But Constantine's proposed method of cure also highlights a parallel between the murder of the children and the murder of Christ. The First Torturer explains that:

I will kill them
Without fear here nor pity
More than (for) a wild hart of the wood
(*BM*, ll. 1616-1618).

Significantly, the murder of Christ is compared to the death of a hart earlier within *Bewnans Meriasek*. As Meriasek is engaged in dialogue with Teudar about the validity and importance of Christ as the Son of God, Teudar asks:

What need was there for God's son

To be slain like a hart?
(*BM*, ll. 880-881).

This parallel also exists in the original Middle Cornish, for the word *carov* (hart) is used in both cases.²⁸⁸ The simile reveals the Torturer's moral corruption in his disregard for human life, his heresy, and his inability to recognise Christ's suffering for mankind. The hart's symbolic associations with renewal and the shedding of sins are also important in the context of Constantine's redemption, recovery and baptism.²⁸⁹ In this episode, then, Constantine is morally comparable to Herod, and his Torturers' disregard for human life represents the ultimate moral and spiritual impairment that exists within his empire.

Empathy, Atonement and Self-Sacrifice:

The Emperor begins to question the ethics of his actions by his empire's own cultural standards, for he recalls:

As our law records:
Whoso shall slay a child in battle
Will be held a cruel man
(*BM*, ll. 1629-1631).

Specifically, Constantine questions the spiritual costs of his actions, for he expresses his anxiety that: 'I know not, after dying, / Whether there will be pain to my soul' (*BM*, l. 1636). This demonstrates Constantine's gradual moral awakening on his path to conversion. He also begins to express contemporary Christian concerns about death and the afterlife. Constantine finally comes to realise the scale of his actions as the sorrowful gathering of mothers with their children are brought before him. In the presence of this grief-stricken gathering, Constantine is moved to spare the lives of the children and the suffering of their mothers, demonstrating his humanity, mercy and pity, and his acknowledgement of the value of their lives above his own:

O sweet sweets of your mothers!
To you it were a wrong
To be slain because of me.

²⁸⁸ "carov", in: *Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum*, ed. Robert Williams (London: Trubner & Co., 1865), p. 73.

²⁸⁹ See: "stag", *The Medieval Bestiary* (2011), <<http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast162.htm>>

Pity were it, as you know,
To slay here three thousand children
For sake of healing one body.
I had liefer die
In great disease thus
And leave alive certainly
The three thousand children that are here
(*BM*, ll. 1653-1662).

Although Constantine has already martyred ‘some three score [Christians]’ (*BM*, l. 1350) in not shedding the blood of the innocent, he avoids a much larger abomination against God as expressed in *Proverbs* (6:16-19).²⁹⁰ Thus, his actions reverse the narrative of Herod’s Massacre of the Innocents, for he decides to spare the children at his own cost, rather than to kill them. His willingness to sacrifice his own life for the sake of many others is also evocative of Christ’s sacrifice for mankind. Importantly, this creates another parallel between the leprous body and the body of Christ.

The mercy Constantine shows to the infants and their mothers prompts Christ to cure his leprosy, as if it has served its purpose now that he has morally redeemed himself. The gratitude and sympathy the Second Mother shows to Constantine after he frees the children, reveals the change in the audience’s own view of Constantine’s character:

May God provide health
For you, mighty Lord
(*BM*, ll. 1681-1682).

From this point of the play, his leprosy provokes sympathy as he continues to demonstrate his moral worth:

Weary am I here of my life.
For my body that I might have health
I would give half my kingdom,
And all my chattels clearly
(*BM*, ll. 1685-1688).

²⁹⁰ “Six things there are, which the Lord hateth, and the seventh his soul detesteth: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood...” See: *The Book of Proverbs, The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/22001.htm>> 6:16-17.

This contrast to his earlier values highlights the moral transformation of the character. As Peter and Paul seek out Sylvester in order to restore the Emperor's health, the intention to cure Constantine's leprosy is morally justified due to: 'the pity he has had / Towards children tiny and little' (*BM*, ll. 1690-1691). Thus, both Constantine's suffering and the cure of leprosy are attached to his changing moral condition. As Peter and Paul request that Constantine furthers the spread of Christianity by destroying 'All the temples of the false gods' (*BM*, l. 1721), this also provides justification for curing the Emperor, in highlighting what Christianity stands to gain from his healing and conversion.

Conversion to Christianity, Cure, and Completeness:

Sylvester's anxiety over Constantine's non-Christianity highlights the complicated signification of the Emperor's leprous body at this stage of the play. Even though Sylvester recognises that: 'thou deserves / That honour be done to thee' (*BM*, ll. 1760-1761), he expresses that he is troubled at the thought of curing Constantine:

Because of thy being in unbelief,
For fear of suffering death
Incline to thee I will not
(*BM*, ll. 1764-1766).

Although Constantine was afflicted with leprosy as a divine punishment, he has now proven his moral worth in the eyes of Christianity. Yet, Constantine's continuing sickness could be seen to be indicative of his paganism, for despite proving his worthiness he is still a potential opponent of Christianity.

Constantine expresses that he truly desires to become a Christian, and is then baptised by Sylvester: a process that he represents as the means to cure him of his leprosy, for he remarks:

baptised
Thou shalt be surely, and washen,
That thou mayst be healed
(*BM*, ll. 1823-1825).

It is symbolic that Constantine's leprosy is healed through baptism, a process that washes away the sins of his soul, which were represented through his physical

affliction in turn. Through his suffering, Constantine atones for his sins and becomes both spiritually and physically 'whole' upon his baptism and conversion. Constantine's cure through baptism highlights that physical medicine is inferior to spiritual medicine. His baptism marks his moral and spiritual redemption as well as his entry into Christianity: a pattern that also appears in both biblical narratives and medieval visual culture, as demonstrated in the evocative resonance between the images of Naaman's healing and Christ's baptism (figs. 3 and 4).

The exact moment of healing is suggested in the stage-directions: [s.d. The mask away] (*BM*, aft. I. 1835). This occurs directly after Sylvester declares: 'As I beseech him, a full healing!' (*BM*, I. 1835), so it is plausible that the actor playing Sylvester removes Constantine's mask in the dramatic performance of his cure. The use of a mask allows performances of his miraculous cure to be achieved instantaneously. The stage-directions also reveal that as Constantine had gone down into the waters of baptism:

[s.d. there shone forth a marvellous splendour of light. So thence he came forth clean, and declared that he had seen Christ] (*BM*, aft. I. 1853).

This suggests that Constantine's body may be obscured from the audience at this point of the play. If his leprosy was visible on his body as well as his face, any body paint used to portray leper spots could be washed off during this moment of action. The splendour of light also indicates another way that Constantine may not have been visible to the audience, which could have allowed Sylvester to remove his mask out of sight.

Constantine's reflection upon the wounded body of Christ in his moment of recovery emphasises a parallel between the leprous body and Christ's wounds:

Jesus Christ, head of healing,
Right certainly I have seen.
Widely all his wounds
Before me surely uncovered,
I saw them left and right,
And fairly he comforted me
(*BM*, II. 1846-1851).

His spiritual encounter with Christ also highlights how his affliction with leprosy was the means of his atonement and redemption. As Sylvester reflects on Constantine's physical and spiritual changes, he specifically associates Constantine's leprosy with incompleteness:

Thou mayst be joyous.
Though thou wert a loathsome leper,
Thanks to Christ, thou art whole
(*BM*, ll. 1852-1854).

Thus, Constantine's healing signifies his Christianity and that he is morally and spiritually complete. This provides a further example of the condition being used in relation to belief in Christianity. As the moral and spiritual condition of the Emperor develops over this dramatic episode he becomes increasingly closer to attaining the Christian moral and spiritual ideal – a state that he finally embodies upon his baptism, in attaining an ideal physical condition.

Conclusion to Negative Leprosy:

In *Bewnans Meriasek* the suffering of Constantine cannot parallel the suffering of Christ until he has morally redeemed himself in the eyes of Christianity. As a heretic and a persecutor of Christians, Constantine is characterised by his moral and spiritual impairment whilst he is afflicted with leprosy. It is through his suffering that he atones for his sins, and through his baptism that he is cured. This is evocative of how Christ's body is wounded in atoning for the sins of humankind but renewed again upon his resurrection. In the same leprous body, the positive and negative significations of Constantine's condition vary in accordance with his moral and spiritual development. Thus, the leprosy of the Emperor Constantine exemplifies the complexity of social and religious responses to the disease in late-medieval drama.

Neutral Leprosy

The Leprosy of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar in the *Death of Pilate*:

The *Death of Pilate* [DoP] extends from lines 1587-2360 in the *Resurrexio Domini*, the third part of the Cornish *Ordinalia*. Rather like the story of Constantine, this play covers the Emperor Tiberius Caesar's conversion to Christianity over the course of his affliction and cure of leprosy. Since Tiberius was Emperor at the time of Christ's crucifixion, the portrayal of his conversion to Christianity marks a serious triumph for the faith, emphasising its power and influence to the audience. The Emperor himself highlights that he is 'without equal above the people of the world' (DoP, l. 1587).²⁹¹

The narrative of Tiberius' conversion to Christianity and Pilate's suicide is apocryphal. Similar narratives can be found in the thirteenth-century Franciscan *Erfurt Chronicle* in which the leprous Emperor Tiberius is healed by Veronica's veil. In the romance *La Vengeance de Nostre Seigneur* from the twelfth century it is the Emperor Vespasian who is cured by the veil, and Vespasian is also a leper in the fifteenth-century French play *Mystère de la Vengeance*. These sources highlight the medieval popularity of narratives of powerful Emperors stricken with leprosy only to be healed upon their conversion to Christianity. Thus, they each promote the power of Christianity through a disease that is represented to be only curable by God. *The Death of Pilate* is an important play to examine to observe how leprosy is connected to Tiberius' relationship with Christianity, and the neutral signification of his leprosy despite his non-Christianity prior to his cure and conversion.

Affliction and Alterity:

The Death of Pilate begins with the Emperor Tiberius Caesar already afflicted with leprosy. Although the leprosy of the Emperor does not appear to have a negative signification in this play, it is interesting to observe how the non-Christianity of the character is established, especially since this is a defining aspect of the Emperor Constantine's leprosy in *Bewnans Meriasek*. Speaking to his Counsellor in the first

²⁹¹ *The Death of Pilate*, in: *The Ancient Cornish Drama* Volume 2, ed. and trans. Edwin Norris (1859; repr. Milton Keynes: ULAN Press, n.d.), p. 121. All further references are to this edition.

lines of the play, Tiberius outlines his position of authority but his helplessness in his suffering and affliction:

I am without equal above the people of the world
But great is my sadness,
I being sick.
What is best to be done?
If I cannot be cured
I know not what I shall do.
(*DoP*, ll. 1587-1592).

In these lines, the Emperor Tiberius displays his pride in placing himself above the people of the world. This is typical of stage tyrants, and comparable to the description of Constantine as 'a body without peer' (*BM*, l. 1153), as well as the words of Paul when he declares: 'my pere on lyue I trow ys nott found' (*CoSP*, l. 17). Unlike Constantine and Paul, however, Tiberius does not directly demonstrate any moral impairment, although his boastfulness may be suggestive of his spiritual impairment. It indicates that his leprosy at this point may signify his unbelief, a trait that was specifically associated with the disease. Yet, Tiberius' notable absence of negative characteristics coupled with the unknown cause of the condition means that it is difficult to connect his leprosy with his moral and spiritual condition in this play. It is possible that his identity as an important future Christian informs this aspect of his characterisation prior to his conversion.

The Emperor's perception of himself as a man without equal is an aspect of his identity that is challenged by his leprosy, in his vulnerability and dependence on others in the search for a cure. Thus, if his condition does initially signify his pride and heresy, these two characteristics are immediately counteracted, for he places his faith in Christ to cure him early in the play. His Counsellor advises him that Christ:

will cure you
From all malady in this world,
As he is very God
(*DoP*, ll. 1599-1601),

In response, Tiberius sends a Messenger to bring him 'Christ, King of the Jews, / Who is God without equal' (*DoP*, ll. 1618-1619). Notably, this is a parallel to the Emperor's similar words regarding his own power. Thus, it is as if Tiberius has already started to

prove himself worthy of cure. It is for these reasons that the Emperor Tiberius's leprosy has a neutral moral signification.

Method of Cure:

Leprosy is represented as a medically incurable disease in the *Death of Pilate* – not only does the Messenger describe the Emperor's sickness as a 'great malady' (*DoP*, l. 1647) to Veronica but he reveals that 'He finds not a leech who can cure him' (*DoP*, l. 1648). This, in turn, suggests the irrelevance of medieval medical perceptions of cure in the dramatisation of the disease. Since medicine cannot help Tiberius, this also implies that the Emperor believes in and is reliant upon the power of Christ as his only possible means of cure. The Messenger, too, is fully convinced that:

He would cure him really
From all disease in this world
(*DoP*, ll. 1651-1652).

When Veronica informs him that Christ: 'Is dead, gone to clay' (*DoP* l. 1654), he again emphasises the power of Christ as the only hope of a cure: 'If that same body were living, / My lord would be cured' (*DoP*, ll. 16662-1663). Veronica suggests that it will still be possible to heal the Emperor, but only if he has faith in Christ:

A remedy shall be made,
That shall be cure of all malady,
If he believe him to be God of heaven
(*DoP*, ll. 1670-1672).

When Veronica reaches the Emperor she reiterates that he should believe that Christ is the Lord and Saviour of all mankind and instructs him to look at the imprint of Christ's face upon the veil:

Look at it, and in a short time
Thou shalt be cured of thy evil,
Very quickly and rapidly
(*DoP*, ll. 1729-1731).

Here, it seems clear that Veronica is referring to the 'evil' of Tiberius' leprosy, rather than any evil attached to his character. As the Emperor is shown the linen, he

expresses his permanent devotion to Christ and is healed immediately upon kissing the imprint:

O Jesus, full of pity,
Thy dear face I will kiss;
[s.d. He kisses the handkerchief].
Trust is to me that thou wilt cure me
Of all my malady;
O Lord Christ, of heaven and earth,
Worship be to thee always!
[s.d. He is healed of his leprosy].
(*DoP*, ll. 1735-1740).

Although no physical symptoms of the leprosy are described in the play-text, the fact that the Messenger emphasises that his lord is 'so sick' (*DoP*, l. 1664) suggests its visibility to the audience, as do the stage directions: [s.d. He is healed of his leprosy] (*DoP*, aft. l. 1740). It is possible that the disease could have been performed with body paint marking leper spots, as is depicted in fig. 9 illustrating the leprosy of the Emperor Vespasian in the similar play of the French *Mystère de la Vengeance*. The Emperor kneels before he kisses the veil, in the stage directions: [s.d. he kneels] (*DoP*, aft. l. 1734). Whilst he is kneeling, with his face concealed behind the linen, there is an opportunity for any visible manifestation of his leprosy to be removed out of sight of the audience. Since Tiberius kisses the veil, this action could have been used to wipe away any signs of leprosy.

Tiberius' physical transformation conveys the miraculous properties of the veil. Since holy relics were important in medieval pilgrimages, accounts, and narratives of cure, this indicates the importance of dramatically presenting the Emperor's cure. His recovery also highlights once again the healing powers of Christ.

As a leper, Tiberius is dependent upon the help of Christ and only cured through his faith in him. In return for his cure, Veronica requests that the Emperor avenges Christ's death, commanding:

Now, since thou art healed,
Thou mayest know well
There is not any God but he:

Pilate killed him; without fail
Take retribution of him,
For he was Christ, the King of heaven
(*DoP*, ll. 1749-1754).

Since this is a meaningful task on behalf of Christianity, it is worth considering how or whether the role retrospectively affects the signification of Tiberius' leprosy. Interestingly, it is *after* he is healed that Tiberius Caesar is characterised by his ruthless thirst for vengeance on behalf of his faith, in stark contrast to the Emperor Constantine. The fact that the faith is now Christianity seems to make all the difference in how Tiberius' morality is portrayed: his vengefulness towards Pilate is actively encouraged, with Veronica urging him to provide:

the most cruel death
That he can have
(*DoP*, ll. 1972-1973).

Tiberius' role avenging Christ creates another connection between the (retrospective) leprous body and the crucified body of Christ, for it is through his cure and conversion that the Emperor becomes a suitable figure to avenge his death. In turn, this presents the different significations of leprosy according to the leper's relationship with Christianity: although Tiberius' cure serves the purpose of promoting the divinity of Christ and power of Christianity, retrospectively his leprosy is symbolic of his spiritual preparation for avenging Christ's death.

Lepers in the Healing Miracles of *Bewnans Meriasek*:

The First Leper and Second Leper, have extremely brief roles in *Bewnans Meriasek* as they feature in one of the Bishop's healing miracles.²⁹² Defined by their shared disease, the names of the lepers suggest the limited function of their role. The miraculous cure of the lepers is dramatised in a section of the play in which other disabilities and impairments are also healed and attended to by the Bishop Meriasek, including a Deaf Man, a blind Earl, and a Naked Sick Man. Comparison with one of

²⁹² The lepers have roles from lines 3099-3155 of the play.

these characters alongside the two lepers provides us with an understanding of how leprosy is being used in *Bewnans Meriasek*.

The First and Second Lepers appear in the play already afflicted with leprosy, and no insight is provided into how the disease was contracted. The healing miracle of the lepers does, however, provide insight into responses to the disease within the church – especially since the Chaplain instructs them to remain at a distance. In addition, this section of the play allows us to consider how the lepers function to promote the power of Christianity and the sanctity of St. Meriasek, whose cult was important locally.

Christian Lepers and the Search for Spiritual Healing:

The section concerning the healing of the two lepers begins when the First Leper appeals to the Lord for help with his sickness. It is significant that the lepers turn directly to Christianity in their search for a cure, confirming the perception of the disease as medically incurable. In particular, the lepers look to the Bishop Meriasek for help. As the First Leper addresses the Lord, he highlights his search for Meriasek:

Lord of the heaven, what shall I do?
For certainly I am so sick
No son of man loves to look upon me.
As I have heard, Meriasek
Has healed poor folk
Whatever be their disease:
Go to him heartily
I will to seek help
(*BM*, ll. 3099-3106).

Here, the First Leper refers to the noticeable physical form his leprosy has taken, which he suggests is visually repugnant. This emphasis upon his unsightliness has the effect of heightening the miracle of the cure that the Bishop Meriasek helps to achieve. Despite their ugliness, there is a notable absence of negative implications about the moral and spiritual condition of the lepers. Instead, the focus is on the Bishop Meriasek, who, as the First Leper emphasises, can heal people ‘Whatever be their disease’ (*BM*, l. 3104). Leprosy is used as a visibly serious medical condition in

order to portray the sanctity of Bishop Meriasek in his compassion for the lepers and his assistance with their cure.

Despite the First Leper's mention of his unsightly appearance, it is not clear how the disease is visibly represented to the audience, which presents a clear contrast to the specific detail of the leper mask in the portrayal of the Emperor Constantine's leprosy within the same play-text. Since the Emperor Constantine's leprosy directly represents his moral condition (whereas this is not the case for the First and Second Leper), it is plausible that there was a contrast between the performances of leprosy for these characters. Whilst this may explain why there is no mention of the leper mask used for Constantine, it is also possible that the staging needs underlie any difference in physical representation, rather than moral factors.

Although the roles of the two lepers are relatively brief, the characters still provide an interesting account of responses to the disease. As the Second Leper makes his own appeal to Meriasek for a cure, he reveals how they have been treated:

Meriasek, a great blessing to thee!
We are two separated men,
Needs not to say it to you.
For love of Christ above
We would pray you certainly
To heal us surely
(*BM*, ll. 3107-3112).

The description of the lepers as 'separated men' is suggestive of the socially imposed distance that lepers kept from people and certain public places. Meriasek's Chaplain also commands the lepers to:

Stand ye without on one side!
It is not truly for lepers
To come in the face of lord
(*BM*, ll. 3113-3115).

Such a constraint could be imposed upon lepers by the church in the Mass of Separation.²⁹³ The lepers' identity as 'separated men' is also indicative of the visibility of their leprosy in some form, and in addition to the physiological manifestations of the disease, they may also have worn clothing associated with lepers (see figs. 11 and 12).

Despite the Chaplain's initial response, Meriasek presents a different reaction, urging the Chaplain:

Ah no more, my sweet chaplain,
Reprove poor folk
That may be come to me
(*BM*, ll. 3119-3121).

In accepting the lepers into his care, Meriasek breaks the cycle of isolation and stigmatisation that has been imposed upon them. There may be a deliberate echo of Christ's own command to his disciples in *Luke* (18:15-17):

And they brought unto him also infants, that he might touch them. Which when the disciples saw, they rebuked them. But Jesus, calling them together, said: Suffer children to come to me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God.²⁹⁴

This has the effect of highlighting the parallel between the Bishop Meriasek and Christ, as a man serving all Christians without discrimination.²⁹⁵ Meriasek's acceptance and miraculous cure challenges the medical assumptions of the incurability of leprosy, as well as the cultural stigma of the disease.

In curing the disease, the Bishop Meriasek calls upon the power of prayer to heal the lepers as he appeals to the Virgin Mary:

Mary, from their grief
Help the needy ones.
Mary, as I beseech thee,

²⁹³ In the thirteenth century, the Mass of Separation could include words such as "I forbid you to ever enter a church". See: Charles Savona-Ventura, "Kings, Knights and Lepers", *History of Medicine On-Line* (2009), <http://www.priory.com/history_of_medicine/leprosy.htm>

²⁹⁴ *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Challoner, 18:15-17.

²⁹⁵ Similarly, after the cure of the Demoniac (a man possessed by an evil spirit) and a Deaf Man, the Bishop Meriasek refers to them both as "My sweet children" (*BM*, l. 2676).

Heal these, body and face
(*BM*, ll. 3136-3139).

The subsequent cure suggests a physical transformation, emphasising its miraculous quality:

My comrade, thou art healed
Clear and fair, skin and face
(*BM*, ll. 3143-3144).

In performing this miraculous transformation, the First Leper and Second Leper may have faced away from the audience during Meriasek's prayers, and then have cleaned or wiped away any body paint depicting spots or sores, revealing their clear, fair skin. Alternatively, their faces could have been concealed through a costume such as a hooded leper cloak, as shown in figs. 11 and 12.

The Bishop's prayer for the lepers to be cured continues to use the disease in promotion of Christianity. As the lepers give their thanks to Christ and to Meriasek, Meriasek instructs them to thank Christ only and to:

Believe ye this, my children,
That Jesu is all helping
Both strong and weak
(*BM*, ll. 3153-3155).

Here, Meriasek demonstrates his humility in attributing this miracle to Christ and his power and mercy to all people, which is indicative that the function of leprosy is to be miraculously cured. Yet, in his own acceptance of the lepers, here Meriasek also highlights his parallel to Christ by helping those in need. This encapsulates the function of the miraculous healing of these two lepers in the play: to strengthen devotion to both Christ and Meriasek in demonstrating their powers and virtuous qualities.

Whilst the lepers' existing devotion to Christianity is not notably strengthened upon their cure, their appreciation of the Bishop Meriasek's sanctity is – the Second Leper declares: 'Meriasek, reverence to you, / In work a blessed man' (*BM*, ll. 3149-3150), thus strengthening the audience's devotion to their local saint. This places the First Leper and Second Leper of *Bewnans Meriasek* in a category of

neutral signification, since their suffering is used within the context of their devotion to God and the Bishop Meriasek, in order to promote Christianity.

Treatment of the Lepers:

Comparing the treatment of the lepers with the cure of another sick Christian in the play-text may be revealing. The most comparable affliction to leprosy is the disease of the Fever Patient. He refers to his afflictions as 'A thief of a disease' (*BM*, l. 679) and asks Meriasek to:

Help us clearly
For love of dear Jesu
(*BM*, ll. 698-699).

Meriasek immediately asks that the Fever Patient be granted healing: 'May Jesu, Lord of heaven and of the earth, / Grant healing to you!' (*BM*, ll. 700-701), and the character then indicates that he is cured:

And I am cured, thanks to Christ!
Meriasek sweet, full of grace,
God's fortune to him will not fail
(*BM*, ll. 713-715).

Like the lepers, no attention is given to the causes of the disease or what it may signify: it exists only to be presented before the Bishop Meriasek and then cured. The Fever Patient's final response to this healing miracle promotes the power of Christ and Meriasek, suggesting that this is the central focus.

The challenging range of diseases presented before an important Christian, as seen in *Bewnans Meriasek*, can be traced back to the Bible. The words of Christ in the gospel of *Luke* that are echoed in the words of the Bishop Meriasek come from a chapter of the New Testament that also covers healing miracles of the disabled and afflicted from one patient to the next. Even though the focus on the lepers' separation has clear links with its medieval social and cultural construction, these responses are also rooted in religious perceptions of the disease. This suggests that the presentation of leprosy in this section of the play is informed by its medieval construction in addition to its representation in biblical literature. Since the leprosy

of the First and Second Leper is morally neutral, its function is parallel to that of the Blind Man in the Chester *Glovers' Play* – as Christ explained, the affliction was acquired:

for this cause spetiallye:
to sett forth Goddes great glorye,
his power to shewe manifestlye
(Ch. *GP*, ll. 55-57).

Notably, this dramatic episode is also based upon biblical sources. However, the miraculous cure of leprosy has a further function in its emphasis upon the virtue and sanctity of the local St. Meriasek.

Simon the Leper in the Chester *Corvisors' Play*:

Simon the Leper is the usual name of a biblical figure who features in a range of extant medieval drama including the plays of York, Towneley, N-Town, Chester, and Cornwall. Yet, of all these collections, Simon's leprosy is only acknowledged in the Chester *Corvisors' Play*, in which the character briefly reflects on his previous affliction. Although Simon's leprosy is acknowledged in influential medieval texts such as the *Golden Legend*, in this text it is only ever referred to briefly, and even then, it has already been cured: 'Simon the leper, whom Christ cured of leprosy'.²⁹⁶ Simon's leprosy itself is a subject that is almost entirely ignored in the medieval period, and there are no narratives of his affliction or cure. Consequently, scholars such as Losch have suggested that 'Simon the Leper' is a mistranslation, since the Aramaic for 'leper' is very similar to the Hebrew for 'jar merchant'.²⁹⁷ In the *Corvisors' Play* the signification of his leprosy is neutral and thus does not reflect upon Simon the Leper's moral and spiritual condition, despite the multivalent significations of the disease. Instead, the cure of his leprosy is situated only within the miracles of Christ.

²⁹⁶ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.126.

²⁹⁷ Richard R. Losch, *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), p. 404.

Simon the Cured Leper and Christ's Transformations:

As Simon the Leper welcomes Christ to his house, the character immediately explains that he is now a healed leper:

Welcome, Jesu, full of grace,
that mee that fowle and mesell was
all whole, lord, thou healed hase,
over all for to showe
(Ch. *CP*, ll. 17-20).

This account of Simon's former leprosy is centred on his physical transformation through the power of Christ. Although symptoms of the leprosy such as measles and ugliness are mentioned, Simon the Leper's moral and spiritual condition is not attached to this description, nor is it apparent how his leprosy was contracted.

Significantly, Simon the Leper is not the only character present in this episode that has undergone a transformation at the hands of Christ, since Mary Magdalene and Lazarus also feature in the play.²⁹⁸ The playwright also uses these characters as symbols of their moral and physical transformations at the hands of Christ. Lazarus's transformation is linked to that of Simon the Leper at the beginning of the play by Philippus when he outlines that:

Lazarre thou raysted through thy pittye,
and Simon also – mesell was hee –
thou clensed, lord, that wotten we,
and holpe them through thy grace
(Ch. *CP*, ll. 13-16).

These transformations are then used to foreshadow Mary's moral transformation. The episode at the house of Simon the Leper is significant in the narrative of Christ and Mary Magdalene, for this is where she confesses her sins, washes and kisses his feet, and anoints him with an ointment. When Simon warns of Mary's immoral reputation, Christ not only demonstrates acceptance and forgiveness, but makes a direct comparison of Simon's and Mary's behaviour and devotion:

²⁹⁸ The Lazarus in this play is Lazarus of Bethany and should not be confused with the Lazarus in the parable of Dives and Lazarus in the gospel of *Luke*. This latter Lazarus is the patron saint of lepers, which is why the word "lazar" came to mean "leper".

Into thy house here thou me geete;
no water thou gave mee to my feete.
Shee washed them with her teares weete
and wyped them with her heare.
Kisse syth I came thou gave non,
but syth shee came into this wonne
shee hath kyssed my feete eychon;
of weeping shee never ceased.
With oyle thou hast not me anynt,
but shee hat donne both foot and joint.
Therefore I tell thee on poynt,
mych synne is her released
(Ch. *CP*, ll. 101-112).

Here, Christ contrasts Simon's actions as a host with the reception he received from Mary Magdalene, in order to convince him that Mary is a repentant sinner who deserves redemption. It is worth considering how this comparison reflects on Simon the Leper. In spite of the contrast between the transformations of Mary and Simon (which are moral and physical respectively), leprosy could be an outward symbol of sinfulness, and like Mary's prostitution, was regarded as an 'unclean' physical condition. A connection between Mary's sin and Simon's former leprosy is even made in the characters' own descriptions of their transformations, for both employ the word 'fowle'. Whereas Mary reflects that 'from fowle life unto great lee / releevd me, lord, for love' (Ch. *CP*, ll. 134-135), Simon the Leper describes his affliction 'that fowle and mesell was' (Ch. *CP*, l. 18). It is also possible that the transformations of Mary and Simon the Leper from their 'fowle' conditions project forwards on to the moral corruption of Judas, who, in his conspiracy against Christ, expresses his intent to 'fowle him' (Ch. *CP*, l. 300). Whilst Simon's former leprosy may thus hint at his previous sinfulness, it is clear that his disease continues to be used as a symbol of his own transformation at the hands of Christ throughout the play, thus portraying his acceptance of all people into Christianity.

The other figure notable for his transformation is Lazarus, who was resurrected by Christ. Lazarus describes his own transformation:

From death to life through thy vertue
Thou raysed me not yore.
Fowre dayes in yearth when I had layne

thou grantest me life, lord, agayne
(Ch. *CP*, ll. 27-30).

In these words, Lazarus attributes the miracle of his resurrection to the virtue of Christ. In representing all of these miraculous transformations, the *Corvisors' Play* uses Simon the Leper's leprosy, Lazarus' resurrection, and Mary Magdalene's redemption to symbolise the physical, spiritual, and moral transformations they have each undertaken. Overall, this highlights the divine mercy of Christ to redeem and transform both the body and the soul. These three figures are also important for what they each represent: Simon the Leper is an example of Christ's powers to heal; Mary Magdalene of his power to forgive sins; and Lazarus of his ability to resurrect. Thus, together they amount to what Christ embodies and achieves in his own transformation in his death and resurrection: the salvation of mankind. Since Mary Magdalene undergoes her moral and spiritual transformation during the course of the play, the accounts of both Simon the Leper and Lazarus in their transformations reflect forwards into the story of Mary Magdalene in hers.

Although there is little material from the *Corvisors' Play* that relates directly to a discussion of leprosy, it is still significant to observe the ways in which the disease is used. Without any insight into Simon the Leper's former suffering and affliction of leprosy, his body can only be interpreted in terms of Christ's capacity to heal. This provides another example of 'neutral' leprosy, portraying Christ's power. But the foreshadowing of Christ's own death and resurrection in the emphasis given to Simon the Leper, Lazarus and Mary Magdalene in their own transformations, is also noteworthy, recalling the visual similarities between the leprous body and Christ as the Man of Sorrows with the wounds of his body symbolising the sins of humankind. Overall, Simon the Leper's healed body embodies Christ's powers to cure leprosy, and serves to emphasise his powers of redemption, both for Mary Magdalene and humanity. Even in this brief example of a former leper in medieval drama, it is evident that the disease is used overtly in promotion of Christianity.

Conclusion to Neutral Leprosy:

Leprosy with a neutral signification does not reflect on the moral or spiritual condition of individual characters in medieval drama, even though each of these

cases of 'neutral' leprosy have actively positive force in demonstrating the glory of God in their cures. For the First and Second Lepers of *Bewnans Meriasek* and Simon the Leper in the Chester *Corvisors' Play* the cure of an incurable disease showcases the power of Christianity. But the Emperor Tiberius Caesar in the *Passio Christi* provides a slightly different example since his recovery from the condition occurs through his conversion to Christianity. The Emperor attains the ideal moral, spiritual and physical condition upon his recovery and acceptance of Christianity, thus becoming a suitable figure to avenge Christ's death. Tiberius' (retrospective) leprous body is therefore an interesting contrast to the other 'neutral' lepers: even though his leprosy is consistently neutral, it is his healed body that reflects the moral and spiritual dimensions of the character. This demonstrates the different uses and symbolic values of the disease of leprosy in medieval drama, even within this single category.

3) Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the different textual and physical representations of lepers in medieval drama specifically are defined by their relationship to Christianity through their positive, negative, or neutral significations. In turn, the contrasting significations and different circumstances of each instance of leprosy in medieval drama demonstrate the variable use of the disease overall. Different aspects of its medieval medical and cultural constructions are utilised, acknowledged or ignored in the conflicting and multivalent representations of the disease.

It is striking that the only two plays to mention attempts to cure leprosy through medicine both feature conversion to Christianity. Whilst the significations of the leprosy of the Emperors Constantine and Tiberius are categorised differently – as 'negative' and 'neutral', in each play the power of Christianity is shown through the inferiority of physical medicine to spiritual healing. In Tiberius' case physical medicine is mentioned but dismissed as ineffective, resulting in Christ being his only chance of cure. Constantine's endeavour to find a cure, however, is actively dramatised and it is through his selfish and barbaric intentions to use the blood of infants as medicine that his 'moral leprosy' is highlighted. Whilst these examples reflect perceptions of the medical limitations of the chance of curing leprosy, they

are also comparable to the inferiority of physical medicine highlighted through Salomé in the N-Town *Nativity* as well as Jonathas in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. For instance, prior to Jonathas' cure through conversion to Christianity, his physical affliction is the subject of a comedic interlude, in which the drunken quack-doctor Master Brundyche and his servant Colle attempt to tend to Jonathas' severed hand. However, as Jonathas' severed hand is clearly beyond medical cure, this demonstrates the foolishness of the physician and highlights that physical medicine is inferior to spiritual healing. Each of these examples involve the body and affliction of the unbeliever, thus demonstrating how the afflicted body of the unbeliever could be used to promote the power of Christianity either in actively demonstrating the inferiority of physical medicine or dismissing it (as occurs with Tiberius).

The idea of leprosy as a form of purgatory features even in medical thought, for Chauliac asserts that 'if leprose men were reprobued, it were a purgatorie to þe soule'.²⁹⁹ This interpretation of the condition attaining salvation through suffering is interesting to consider in representations of the disease in medieval drama. Notably, Tiberius and Constantine both achieve salvation in converting to Christianity. The First and Second Lepers also conform to Chauliac's spiritual interpretation of leprosy despite its neutral moral and spiritual signification, for they both call for 'Goddes help' and are subsequently healed.³⁰⁰ Even though the Smith's leprosy appears to be penitential, rather than purgatorial, since he suffers through his love and devotion to Christ, his affliction still demonstrates the love God has for lepers – an opinion seen in both medical and cultural thought. The same can also be said of Simon the Leper, whose transformation from a leper is also used in parallel with the salvation of Mary Magdalene.

Despite the different relationships each of the lepers has with Christianity, it is important to observe that the leprous body can evoke the wounded body of Christ across the different categories. This evocation is physical in the case of the Smith, whose leprous hands are symbolic of Christ's crucifixion wounds. Although Christ's

²⁹⁹ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 381. The emphasis is mine.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

wounded body is imagined and described by Constantine during his baptism, the similarities between the leprous body and the body of Christ would also have been visually apparent to the audience. His salvation through physical transformation is therefore also a parallel to the salvation of mankind achieved through Christ's crucifixion. The body of Tiberius also visually evokes the body of Christ, although this only occurs *after* his cure. Notably, in his grief for Christ, Tiberius speaks of the 'sorrow on my heart' (*DoP*, l. 1765), evoking both the sorrow of Christ and his heart wound. Thus the wounded body of Christ is evoked whether the signification of the leprosy is positive, negative or neutral, as well as whether it is present or cured.

The popularity of leprosy in medieval drama, which is only ever cured through Christianity, suggests its clear impact as a serious disease, even though there was a significant decrease in the number of people afflicted with it by the late-medieval period. These cultural perceptions that leprosy was incurable are used to heighten the miracle of its cure. The varying significations of the disease can be explained by the dramatists' own awareness of the multiple implications of the disease from a divine gift to proof of heresy, thus suggesting their purposeful manipulation of constructions of the condition. In conclusion, the signification of leprosy is inconsistent in medieval drama, even though the use of the disease consistently portrays and promotes the power of Christianity.

Chapter Four

Wounds, Mutilation, and Dismemberment: Constructions, Representations and Signification

1) Introduction

Wounds carried important symbolic value in the medieval period: particularly the wounds of Christ, which had a strong presence throughout religious life. Increasingly graphic depictions and evocations of Christ's wounded body appeared throughout late-medieval art and literature and became a central devotional focus through which viewers and worshippers could meditate on his suffering and sacrifice. Devotion to the wounds became so strong that there was a Mass of the Five Wounds.³⁰¹ As his wounds were such dominant symbols, this chapter will focus specifically on Christ in a range of plays before exploring the significations of other wounds. The wounded body of Christ affects and defines the significations of many other wounds, both within and beyond medieval drama.

Christ's wounds had come to be multivalent symbols even by the eighth century, as proof of his death and resurrection, a demonstration of love, an accusation of sin, and an intercession to God.³⁰² From this century onwards, his wounds could be interpreted as places of refuge for sinners – an idea seen in Richard Rolle's fourteenth-century meditations on the Passion, in his comparison of Christ's wounds to a dovecote:

just as a dove being chased by a hawk is safe enough if she can only get to an opening in her dovecote, so, sweet Jesu, your wounds are the best refuge [for us] in every temptation.³⁰³

Similarly, Julian of Norwich responds to Christ's side wound as a place of refuge:

³⁰¹ As Duffy has observed, the Mass of the Five Wounds was a particularly popular votive Mass during the late Middle Ages. The prayer focuses on both Christ and the Christian in their moment of death. See: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 243.

³⁰² Caroline Walker-Bynum, "Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety" *GHI Bulletin* 30 (2002): p. 29.

³⁰³ Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, ed. and trans. Rosamund Allen (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 113.

than He shewid a faire, delectabil place and large enow for al
mankynd that shal be save to resten in pece and in love.³⁰⁴

As well as a dovecote, Richard Rolle compared the wounded body of Christ to a honeycomb (with the cells of the honeycomb as Christ's individual wounds), and a net to catch him: 'so that sin can never set me free from the confining walls of virtue'.³⁰⁵ These comparisons and many similar images highlight the numerous responses to Christ's wounds in medieval religious life, and the subsequent influence of the spiritual interpretation of these wounds on the signification of wounded, mutilated or dismembered bodies.

Wounds might also possess moral significations, as seen in works such as *The Book of Holy Medicines* from the fourteenth century. In this autobiographical and confessional text, Henry of Grosmont reflects on his past sins, describing himself as possessing a sick body with seven metaphorical wounds: one for each of the seven deadly sins. Asking for medicine from Christ and the Virgin Mary, Henry of Grosmont details the foul, festering appearance and smell of his wounds, as he expresses his perceptions of his own moral impairment:

this foul and evil stinking hole is my wicked and foul heart which
is so grievously wounded, as I have shown before, and I have
asked for medicines sufficient for my condition ... I have asked
for the bandage of your joys ... to protect me cleanly as a sore so
perilous and mortal ought to be protected...from all foul delight,
from evil thoughts, from memories of and pleasure in old sins.

³⁰⁶

It is unclear whether the moral association that could exist between wounds and sinfulness originated from the idea of Christ's wounded body displaying the effects of the sins of mankind. Since moral associations of wounds do not always explicitly reference Christ, this may suggest the independent existence of this association, regardless of how it developed. The same moral approach, using the metaphor of

³⁰⁴ Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. G. R. Crampton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/crampton-shewings-of-julian-norwich>> Part 1, Chapter 24, ll. 865-867.

³⁰⁵ Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, ed. and trans. Rosamund Allen (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 113.

³⁰⁶ As cited in: Teresa Tavormina, "The Book of Holy Medicines", in: *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Literature in Translation*, trans. Teresa Tavormina. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 39.

the wounds of the body to represent its sinfulness, appears in the thirteenth-century manual of confession, the *Summula* of the Synod of the Diocese of Exeter:

Just as it is proper for a person to undress completely to show his bodily wounds to a doctor or surgeon, since confession is the healing of injuries done to the soul it is proper for someone to reveal all his inner wounds to his spiritual doctor.³⁰⁷

Here, wounds are used as a metaphor for spiritual condition, emphasising the spiritual healing of confession. This provides evidence of the different uses of the moral associations of wounds: as a physical symbol of moral decay as well as a pathway to an improved spiritual state. Similarly, the thirteenth-century manual for anchoresses, the *Ancrene Wisse*, sees physical affliction as healing the soul and the wounds of the spiritual body:

Thus is secnesse sawlene heale, salve of hire wunden, scheld,
thet ha ne kecche ma, as Godd sith thet ha schulde, yef secnesse
hit ne lette.³⁰⁸

Since wounds could possess conflicting significations, this chapter will examine wounds over a moral spectrum. It is clear that wounds in medieval drama are used to very different effects, especially in the multivalent body of Christ, which has its own spectrum of signification. Outside of Christ's body, wounds, mutilation and dismemberment often refer back to the wounds of Christ and the sacred, even over a moral spectrum of characters. This chapter will explore how the different significations of the wounded body inform the drama.

Wounds, Mutilation, and Dismemberment in Late-Medieval Thought

Wounds in Medical Thought:

Wounds were considered to disrupt the continuity of the body as a breach in its complete form. This idea of the *solutio continuitatis* (the dissolution of the continuity of the body) originated from Galen, but was popularised in the thirteenth century by

³⁰⁷ As cited in: J. Shinnars and W. J. Dohar, *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England*, eds. J. Shinnars and W. J. Dohar, trans. J. Shinnars (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p. 170.

³⁰⁸ *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Hasenfratz, Part Four, ll. 59-60.

Avicenna's *Canon*.³⁰⁹ Guy de Chauliac specifically defines wounds in this way in the fourteenth century: 'A wounde is a lousynge of contynuhede, fresshe and bledynge, made wipoute rotynge in softe partyes', and goes on to explain the different types of wound that caused a loss of continuance:

vulnus (i. a wounde) and vlcus (i. a vlcer), apertura (i. opening), punctura (i. prickynge), inscicio (i. kyttyng), euulsio (i. outdrawing), fractura (i. breking) and soche opere.³¹⁰

Karine van't Land has observed that in the process of healing wounds, emphasis was placed upon regaining the continuity of the body rather than closing the wound.³¹¹ Continuity could be regained through the production of new flesh in order to fill the wound, which could be generated through digestion. Since Chauliac makes specific reference to the fact that wounds could be 'heled by þe wille of God', it is interesting to note the overlap between religion and medicine in medical texts on wound care.³¹²

The medical approaches to wounds, as breaches in the body's wholeness, or as needing to be purged, or restored with new flesh, are comparable to the metaphorical images of wounds in devotional texts. This is apparent in a work such as Henry of Grosmont's *Book of Holy Medicines*, which expresses its spiritual and religious meanings through descriptions of wound care. Grosmont also links the medical and spiritual in other ways, by connecting the wounded body of Christ to Christ in his role as a divine physician (*Christus Medicus*), since the medicine that Henry requests is the blood of Christ. It is paradoxical that Grosmont connects his own wounded body, marred by his personal sinfulness, to the wounds of Christ's body made in sacrifice for mankind. This demonstrates the moral and spiritual 'scale' on which comparisons could be made to Christ's wounded body.

³⁰⁹ Karine van't Land, "The Solution of Continuous Things: Wounds in Late Medieval Medicine", in: *Wounds in the Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 90-91, p. 105.

³¹⁰ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 177.

³¹¹ van't Land, "The Solution of Continuous Things" p. 89.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

The Signification of Christ's Wounds and Cultural Responses:

The five wounds of the crucifixion were understood to have a range of specific meanings, as an intercession to God, an accusation of sin, a demonstration of love, and proof of his death and resurrection. The side wound, which was made in order to prove that Christ was dead, pierced his heart and 'there came out blood and water'.³¹³ Whereas the water symbolised baptism, the blood of Christ's heart symbolised his love for mankind. Julian of Norwich, for instance, makes reference to the 'dereworthy blode and pretious water which He lete poure al oute for love'.³¹⁴ The blood of Christ's heart wound was an important part of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The connection between this sacrament and Christ's wound is directly portrayed in fig. 1, which depicts a chalice containing the bloody side wound of Christ. This image highlights that drinking the wine of the Eucharist is like drinking directly from the side wound of Christ.

As the wounds of Christ did not heal, they also became the proof of his resurrection, just as they are in the New Testament. In the gospel of *Luke* (24:40), Christ shows his wounds to Cleophas and Luke as proof of his resurrection, and the disciple Thomas only ceases to doubt once he has put his finger into Christ's side wound in the gospel of *John* (20:27). In the thirteenth century, the mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg asserted that:

the wounds of Christ will bleed until there is no more human sin
- that is, they will bleed, accusing sinners, until Judgment Day
itself.³¹⁵

Thus, Christ's wounds were a testament to his divinity, and a symbol of his sacrifice, his divine mercy, and the redemption of mankind's sin.

The literal causes of Christ's wounds were the instruments of Christ's passion, which became known as the *arma Christi*. The wounds they caused also signified the sins of mankind as the Man of Sorrows. The *arma Christi* featured consistently in literary and visual culture, symbolising Christ's victory over death and the devil. These

³¹³ *The Gospel of John*, ed. Challoner, 19:34.

³¹⁴ Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*. Part 1, Chapter 24, ll. 867-868.

³¹⁵ As cited in: Walker-Bynum, "Violent Imagery" p. 27.

instruments included ropes, hammers, nails, the holy sponge, and the holy lance, a selection of which can be seen surrounding the image of Christ as the Man of Sorrows in fig. 2. These weapons were perceived to have armed Christ against the devil, for it is through his death that his victory over the devil was achieved. A fourteenth-century Middle English poem in the *Arma Christi* rolls describes the impact of each weapon upon Christ, and details the ways in which they assist the faithful to overcome sin.³¹⁶ Thus, the *arma Christi* became a symbol of protection against sin, which is why nails and other instruments became devotional objects in the late-medieval period. For this reason, the nails of Christ's Passion are referred to as *dulces clavos* (sweet nails) in the antiphon *Crux Fidelis*.³¹⁷

As Bynum has noted, the devotional focus on the *arma Christi* contributed to the 'visual association of fragmented body parts with passion piety'.³¹⁸ The act of swearing was also associated with dismembering Christ's body: in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, three young men swear oaths by different parts of Christ's body. The Pardoner responds to the swearing as actively dismembering Christ's body:

many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn,
And Cristes blessed body they torente
Deeth shal be deed, if that they may hym hente.³¹⁹

A similar portrayal can be found in Robert Mannyng's fourteenth-century devotional text, *Handlyng Synne*:

To swere grete othys grysly,
As we folys do al day,
Dymembre Ihu al that we may.³²⁰

The implication of these moral interpretations of dismembering Christ anew is that by continuing to sin after the redemption, mankind destroys the resurrected body

³¹⁶ Known as the *Arma Christi* this poem is located in the *Arma Christi* Rolls. See: Rossell H. Robbins "Arma Christi Rolls", *The Modern Language Review*, 34(3) (1939): p. 415.

³¹⁷ See note to lines 52-54 in: *The Road to Calvary*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays* ed. C. Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-34-the-road-to-calvary>>

³¹⁸ Walker-Bynum, "Violent Imagery" p. 5.

³¹⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale*, in: *The Riverside Chaucer* eds. Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 708-710, p. 199.

³²⁰ As cited in: Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poets, Saints and Society in Fifteenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), *Handlyng Synne*, ll. 666-668, p. 113.

which had previously been offered in sacrifice. There were also cautionary images of oath-swearing dismembering Christ, as can be seen in fig. 3, a fifteenth-century wall painting from Milton Keynes, in which a number of swearers each hold different pieces of Christ's body such as his heart, hand, and foot. In the middle of the image, the Virgin Mary holds Christ's body in her arms, his right leg depicted without a foot. The nine fashionably dressed men (the swearers) may portray the intended audience of this moral example. Thus, viewers, readers and audiences were encouraged to respond to Christ's wounds in terms of their own moral behaviour.

The symbolic wounds of Christ are specifically used to discourage sin in poems such as *The Wounds and the Sins*, in which readers are encouraged to identify with his suffering and abstain from the seven deadly sins.³²¹ Each sin is connected to either one of the five wounds, or his suffering in the Passion. The sin of envy, for instance, is likened to an evil spear wounding Christ's heart:

With a scherp spere that was full yll
My hert was prikyd.³²²

Here, Christ describes how his heart wound was created through his love for mankind, reversing the signification of his wound from evil to love, as he encourages the reader: 'Therefor, man, of luffe thou lere'.³²³ Against the sin of sloth, the voice of Christ encourages the reader to be physically active, whilst evoking the wounds in his feet:

Rise up, unlust, oute of thi bed!
Behold my fete that be forbled
And nayled fast on the rode tre;
Behold, therfor — all was for thee.³²⁴

³²¹ *The Wounds and the Sins* refers to a popular fourteenth-century poem contained in Codex Ashmole 61. See: *The Wounds and the Sins*, in: *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008)
<<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffleton-codex-ashmole-61-wounds-and-the-sins>>

³²² *Ibid.*, ll. 5-6.

³²³ *Ibid.*, l. 8.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 25-28.

In the final line of this stanza, Christ uses his own sacrifice to cause the reader to feel love and grief for the human suffering of the wounds and therefore morally and emotionally indebted to him. Thus, the poem uses Christ's wounded and tormented body to encourage the reader to honour his suffering for the salvation of mankind by abstaining from sin. In presenting this moral message, Christ specially draws attention to the visibility of his wounded body in the first two lines of the poem, encouraging the reader to imagine it in detail:

Wyth scherp thoryns that be kene
My hede was crounyd, as ye may sen.³²⁵

Christ also draws attention to his wounds in fig. 4, which displays him as the Man of Sorrows speaking the words 'Lo, here my herte' next to an image of his heart pierced by the five wounds.

A number of different connections were made between the wounded body of Christ and sin, including between the seven deadly sins and the seven times Christ shed blood: at the Circumcision, on Mount Olivet, the scourging, the crown of thorns on his head, the wounds in the feet, the wounds in the hands, and the piercing of his side.³²⁶ The blood of Christ was an integral part of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which commemorated Christ giving his disciples bread and wine as his body and blood to consume in remembrance of him at the Last Supper. As well as being a symbol of Christ's death, resurrection and love for humanity, Christ's blood was thought to possess miraculous and restorative properties. In England, Hailes Abbey was a major destination for pilgrims to see a phial of Christ's blood, and in Germany alone there were pilgrimages to Walldürn, Wilsnack, and Weingarten, which claimed to display the blood:

either collected under the cross on Golgotha or produced
miraculously in case of sacrilege or extreme devotion.³²⁷

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 1-2.

³²⁶ See: "The Wounds and the Sins: Introduction", in: *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008) <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffleton-codex-ashmole-61-wounds-and-the-sins-introduction>>

³²⁷ Walker-Bynum, "Violent Imagery" p. 12.

The blood of Christ flowing through his side wound was of such devotional importance that it was graphically represented in some German ceremonies:

the Passion of Christ was often celebrated by the use of a special crucifix with movable arms ... often to be carried through the streets in triumph. The realism of such dramatizations of the Passion was often heightened by having the figure fitted out with human hair and with a hollow in its side through which a bag of animal blood could be pierced with a spear to simulate the piercing of Christ's side as he hung on the cross.³²⁸

This is indicative of the devotional impact of witnessing Christ's bleeding body, and highlights the similarities between religious worship and drama.

Figure 1: Bleeding Wound of Christ (in Chalice)

15th Century, French (Book of Hours, MS Douce d. 19, f. 077r) Bodleian Library, Oxford



³²⁸ Robert Scribner, "Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany", *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): p. 456.

Figure 2: Man of Sorrows and the Arma Christi
15th Century, English (Woodcut, MS Rawl. D 403. f. 2v) Bodleian Library, Oxford

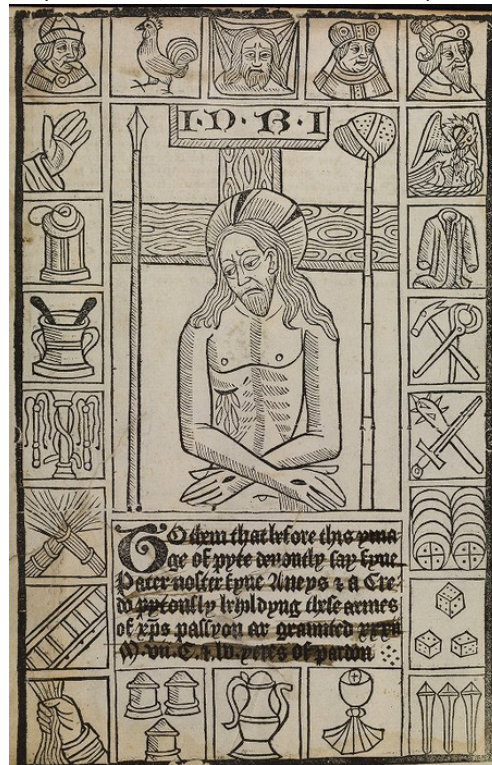


Figure 3: The Warning to Swearers
15th Century, English (Wall Painting, St. Lawrence's Church, Broughton, Buckinghamshire)
The Churches Conservation Trust



Figure 4: The Five Wounds of Christ's Sacred Heart
15th Century, English (Add. MS 37049, f. 20r) British Library, London



The Signification of Sacred Wounds and Cultural Responses:

The wounds of Christian saints, martyrs, and stigmatics would have been perceived as sacred in the late-medieval period. These sacred wounds were widely represented in medieval visual, literary, and devotional culture, and encountered through bodies that mirrored the suffering of Christ, such as stigmatics or lepers. The exact moment that St. Francis received the stigmata is depicted in fig. 5, with his parallel to Christ's own wounds highlighted by the five rays projected by Christ in the form of a six-winged seraph.³²⁹ As these wounds were a reward for St. Francis, who prayed that he might 'feel with his own body the agony of Christ', it is clear that wounds could be a positive symbol in the Christian body.³³⁰

Holy martyrdom was the subject of manuscript paintings, poems and plays, and was celebrated on many holy days such as St. Stephen's Day and the Feast of St. Thomas the Martyr. Devotional focus on the wounds of sacred bodies could be seen in the popularity of reliquaries, which were often lavishly decorated and contained

³²⁹ "Fol. 184v, Hours of Henry VIII", Pierpont Morgan Library Website (2015), <http://www.themorgan.org/collection/hours-of-henry-viii/47>

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

the blood, skull or bone fragments of holy figures (see fig. 6). These reliquaries provided physical evidence of the saints' divine sacrifice, and mediated the relationship between the viewer and the holy figure. Holy relics also inspired pilgrimage as they were thought to provide healing miracles – thus, in the form of relics, the wounds of the sacred could interact with the suffering of pilgrims. It was thought that actions such as making prayers to the martyrs, visiting their tomb or relics, could reduce time spent in purgatory as well as healing physical afflictions.³³¹

The extensive devotional attention given to the martyrs' bodies through celebrations, reliquaries and pilgrimages indicates that they were perceived to physically embody the sanctity of their divine sacrifice. It was also thought that holy wounds could possess a sweet smell, just as St. Paul's body is said to in accounts of his martyrdom, whereas the wounds of the unholy were thought to smell unpleasant.³³² Since the bones of Christian martyrs in Roman catacombs were thought to 'cast off a golden glow and a faintly sweet smell' the bodily remains of martyrs continued to embody their holiness.³³³ A similar embodiment of sanctity occurs in the Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine*, as the body of Catherine glows after she has been wounded.

St. Augustine provides an illuminating response to the wounds of the sacred as beautiful and important. This is in direct contrast to the wounds of ordinary people, which were nothing more than deformity or imperfection. For these ordinary people, Augustine claims that 'deformity which arises when there is not a proper arrangement of parts will not exist in heaven' and such defects 'will be corrected'.³³⁴ Yet, the wounds and dismemberment of the holy martyrs will still be visible because:

³³¹ Lisa Sweet, "Reliquaries", Evergreen State College Website (2008), <<http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/materiality/faculty%20lectures/Reliquaries%20lecture.pdf>>

³³² Lila Yawn, "The Bright Side of the Knife: Dismemberment in Medieval Europe and the Modern Imagination", in: *Wounds in the Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 235.

³³³ Rachel Nuwer, "Meet the Fantastically Bejeweled Skeletons of Catholicism's Forgotten Martyrs", Smithsonian Website (2013), <<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/meet-the-fantastically-bejeweled-skeletons-of-catholicisms-forgotten-martyrs-284882/?no-ist>>

³³⁴ St. Augustine, *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) Book XXII, Chapter 19, p. 1149.

the love we bear for the blessed martyrs makes us desire to see in the kingdom of heaven the marks of the wounds which they received for Christ's name.³³⁵

Imperfections of the 'ordinary' wounded body are thus differentiated from the wounds of martyrs, and Augustine outlines that it is the *marks* of wounds that will be visible in the bodies of the blessed martyrs. He also specifies that in instances of dismemberment, limbs will be restored in heaven:

those martyrs who have had limbs hacked off ... will not lack those limbs at the resurrection of the dead.³³⁶

This suggests that the restored limbs will still bear the marks of wounds as evidence of their devotional sacrifice. St. Augustine also emphasises the special signification of the wounds of martyrs, for he states that these wounds:

will not be a deformity, but a badge of honour, and the beauty of their virtue – a beauty which is in the body, but not of the body – will shine forth in it.³³⁷

Even the marks of wounds are seen as a form of bodily perfection for martyrs:

in that world to come, it will be fitting for them to exhibit some marks of their glorious wounds, still visible in their immortal flesh.³³⁸

Here, Augustine suggests that the marks of sacred wounds signify the spiritual qualities of the martyrs.

These wounds could also be evocative of the body of Christ. For instance, in the *Golden Legend*, St. James the Dismembered compares his amputated fingers and toes to the wounds of Christ's body, including his circumcision and crucifixion wounds. As he is dismembered, St. James offers up the pieces of his body to Christ, and interprets each amputated digit as his spiritual gain. As his third finger is cut off, St. James says:

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1150.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1149-1150.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1150.

I am now set free from threefold temptation, and I will bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.³³⁹

In addition to signifying the saint's own virtuous qualities, these wounds take on even further signification in comparison to the body of Christ, with each wound given its own separate meaning. Thus, it is through the wounds (or the marks of wounds) sustained for Christ that we can contemplate the martyrs' love for him.

There were conflicting ideas about whether Christian martyrs felt pain. Late-medieval images of martyrdom such as those of St. Agatha (see fig. 7) portray the martyr with an expression that suggests her imperviousness to pain.³⁴⁰ In the narrative of her martyrdom, her pain and torture endured in devotional sacrifice is presented as a spiritual preparation of the soul for heaven:

These pains are my delight! It is as if I were hearing some good news, or seeing someone I had long wished to see, or had found a great treasure. The wheat cannot be stored in the barn unless it has been thoroughly threshed and separated from the chaff: so my soul cannot enter paradise unless you make the headsman give me harsh treatment.³⁴¹

Like St. Augustine, St. Agatha glorifies each wound and moment of suffering and suggests that the more suffering is endured the more glory achieved. However, whilst St. Agatha makes reference to her pain in the *Golden Legend*, she takes 'delight' in devotional suffering – perhaps explaining why she appears impervious to pain in fig. 7.

The medieval belief that the saints 'were blessed in death by the anaesthesia of glory' with God granting the 'bliss of the beatific vision to block their pain', has been outlined by Bynum.³⁴² Regarding the martyrs, in the twelfth century, Richard of Saint Victor noted that: 'the greatness of their love alleviated the pain of their suffering'.³⁴³ Yet, whilst Thomas Aquinas remarked that 'the blessed in heaven

³³⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 730.

³⁴⁰ Walker-Bynum, "Violent Imagery" p. 17.

³⁴¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 155.

³⁴² Walker-Bynum, "Violent Imagery" p. 15.

³⁴³ As cited in: Thomas Dale, *Relics, Prayer, and Politics in Medieval Venetia: Romanesque Painting in the Crypt of Aquileia Cathedral* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 61.

possessed every human sensibility except pain', this immunity to pain in heaven does not mean that the saints were immune to pain during their martyrdom.³⁴⁴ Many narratives of martyrdom contain detail of the pain that the saints physically endured: in addition to St. Agatha, St. James the Dismembered specifically refers to the 'pain of the ninth finger' as it is amputated.³⁴⁵ Whilst pain is an ambiguous aspect of martyrdom, the wounds, mutilation and dismemberment sustained by the martyrs remains a testament of their sanctity whether they endured suffering out of love for Christ or were completely impervious to the pain. Overall, sacred wounds had distinctly positive significations and were often perceived as parallels to the wounds of Christ.

Figure 5: The Stigmatisation of St. Francis
16th Century, French (Hours of Henry VIII, MS H.8 f. 184v)
Pierpont Morgan Library, New York



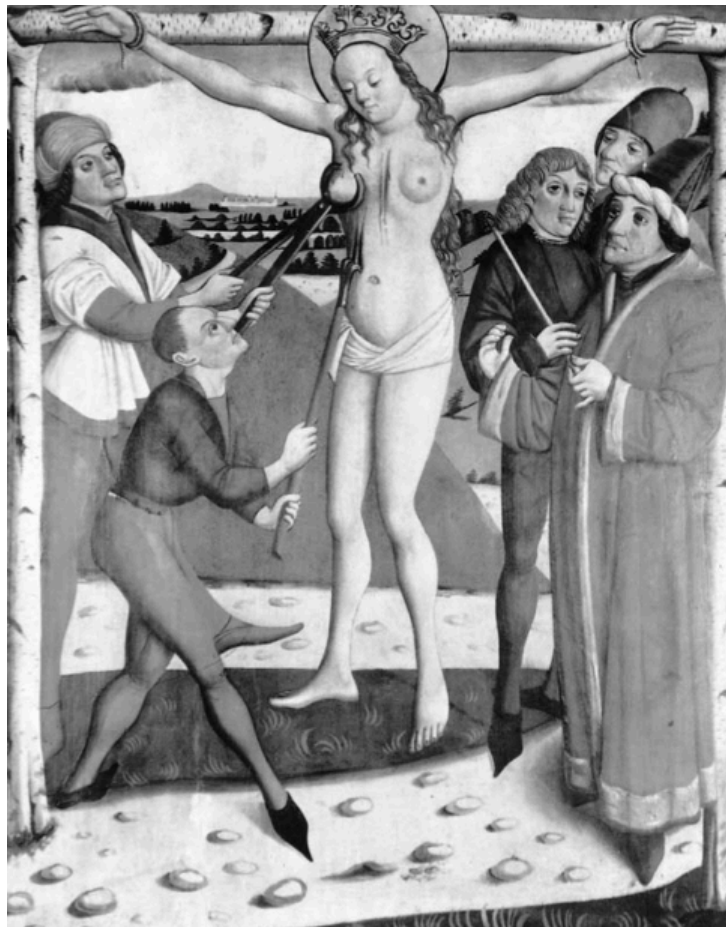
³⁴⁴ As cited in: Scott E. Pincikowski, *Bodies of Pain: Suffering in the Works of Hartmann Von Aue* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 15.

³⁴⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 730.

Figure 6: Arm Reliquary of St. Lawrence
12th Century, German (Cedar Wood, Silver, Partially Gilded) Staatliche Museum, Berlin



Figure 7: Martyrdom of St Agatha
15th Century, Swiss (Panel Painting, Swiss School) Private Collection



Social, Legal and Religious Responses to Wounds:

Christine Ebner's spiritual autobiography from the fourteenth century provides evidence of the desirability of creating and possessing wounds, for she flagellates herself with nettles, switches and thorns in imitation of the scourging of Christ and cuts a cross into her chest.³⁴⁶ However, despite this positive response to wounds, they could also elicit disgust: Henry of Grosmont clearly uses the unpleasant condition of his foul and festering wounds in order to convey his sinfulness – thus it is evident that the wounded body could be associated with uncleanness, as well as physical and moral decay.

In addition to causing physical disgust, the wounded body could also be a generally undesirable condition. In the eleventh-century miracle narratives of St. Foy, for example, a warrior named Rigaud was severely wounded through his right arm and side by a sword. In response to his injuries, Rigaud specifically expresses his longing for death 'rather than to drag out a disgusting and useless life with his body in such a shameful state', although he is healed upon visiting the shrine of St. Foy.³⁴⁷ This account provides evidence of the personal shame that the wounded body could elicit in the individual, not only through the visibility of damage but through the loss of bodily ability.

The value attached to injuries in compensation claims provides evidence of the extent to which wounds were perceived as defects that might permanently affect the lives of individuals. Even as early as the seventh century, in the personal injury clauses of the *Laws of Æthelberht*, compensation was determined by 'the value in physiological terms of the wounded part and the degree to which the damage is visible'.³⁴⁸ A similar practice can be observed in legal texts such as the Old Frisian compensation tariffs (c. 1250-1500), which determined the amount compensation through measurement:

³⁴⁶ Morgan, *On Becoming God*, p. 88.

³⁴⁷ As cited in: Metzler, "Disability in Medieval Europe" p. 198.

³⁴⁸ Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 99.

And the wound is to be measured around along the longer side with the upper joint of the thumb, each measure unit to be compensated with 16 pennies.³⁴⁹

It is particularly interesting, however, that the tariff also specifies that:

The victim has to swear that he did not have the incision applied in order to get more money but only to get his health back.³⁵⁰

This suggests awareness that some compensation claims were made with the intention of extorting money.

A similar response is evident in social and religious anxieties about beggars. Langland's *Piers Plowman* from the fourteenth century raises contemporary concerns about who was deserving of charity, in its condemnation of beggars falsely simulating disability:

Tho were faitours afered, and feyned hem blynde;
Somme leide hir legges aliry, as swiche losels conneth,
And made hir [pleynt] to Piers and preide hym of grace:
“For we have no lymes to laboure with, lord, ygraced be ye!”³⁵¹

In addition to these physical ‘performances’ of disability and impairment, cosmetics could also be abused to falsify damage and defects upon the body.³⁵² As a consequence, anxieties about the classification of the deserving and the undeserving poor can be seen in amendments to the rules of charitable institutions such as hospitals, which could have conflicting ideas about who merited care.³⁵³ Thus, whilst even disgusting wounds could be evocative of Christ, the wounded bodies of beggars could be more complex, embodying contemporary anxieties about charity.

³⁴⁹ As cited in: Han Nijdam “Compensating Body and Honour: The Old Frisian Compensation Tariffs”, in: *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages* eds. Wendy J. Turner and Sara M. Butler (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 44.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, B-Text, passus 6, ll. 121-124.

³⁵² Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Constructions of Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 191

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

2) Plays

Many characters receive wounds in medieval drama, especially Christ, whose wounded body is a central feature in a large number of plays, since N-Town, Towneley, York and Chester, each have extended sequences focussing on the Passion. Considering the central importance of Christ's body perhaps it is not surprising that wounds with both 'positive' or 'negative' significations can evoke the wounded bodies of Christ and the martyrs. It is the virtuous Christian characters that suffer these 'positive wounds', which can be symbols of glory or parallels to the sacred wounded. The wounds of the immoral and the sinful constitute 'negative wounds', which are symbolic of moral and spiritual impairment even in instances where there is an (ironic) parallel to the sacred wounded. Therefore, Christ's wounds will be examined first, allowing the signification of other wounds to be put into context. This will be followed by an examination of other characters inflicted with first positive and lastly, negative wounds.

In the wounds of Christ section, I examine Christ in a range of different roles, providing broad insight into how his wounds were used and physically performed in medieval drama, and what they were used to signify. To start I explore how the silence of Christ during his scourging defines their signification in the N-Town *Trials Before Pilate and Herod*, and how Satan's anticipation of the five wounds affects their meaning in the N-Town play of *Satan and Pilate's Wife*. In the York *Crucifixio Christi*, which prolongs the torture of Christ, I examine how his (eventual) speech in this play affects the signification of his wounds. In these plays, I analyse how the significance of Christ's wounds change with the context, evoking a number of different affective and contemplative responses.

I then examine three plays which use Christ's wounds to elicit emotional responses from the audience. I consider wounds emotionally as well as physically in the N-Town *Crucifixion*, exploring how the Virgin Mary's affective response for Christ in her grief demonstrates to the audience the very response it should have to his wounds. I examine how Thomas uses Christ's wounds to authenticate his resurrected body in the N-Town *Appearance to Thomas* and the York play of *Doubting Thomas* – exploring the natural doubts of the audience. I also investigate the signification of

Christ's wounds in the York *Doomsday* play, which draws on the moral responsibility of the audience. These plays encourage the audience to think on their own emotion, faith, and moral condition through the significations applied to Christ's wounds.

In my section on sacred wounds I also examine Christ-like wounds. Although there are no examples of the stigmata in medieval drama, the brief episode involving the wounded and putrid body of the Naked Man in *Bewnans Meriasek* draws a parallel between the rancid wounds of his afflicted body and the body of Christ. Next, I interpret the parallel of St. Catherine's wounds to Christ, and the Queen's parallel to St. Agatha in the Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine*. The other sacred wound I examine is that of the parallel (metaphorical) wounds of the Virgin Mary in her grief for Christ in the N-Town *Crucifixion*. However, this play is discussed in my section on Christ's wounds.

In my section on negative wounds I explore the wounds of immoral characters and personified vices. As in my section on sacred wounds, the negative wounds I discuss also evoke the wounded bodies of Christ and the martyrs. For instance, in the Cornish *Death of Pilate*, Pilate fatally wounds himself in his heart, in a reverse parallel to Christ's own death. I also discuss how the wounds of the vices in *Mankind* provide ironic parallels to the wounds of Christ and the martyrs. These parallels between the wounded bodies of the profane and the sacred demonstrate the consistent interpretation of wounds in a Christian context.

The Wounds of Christ

The Passion of Christ is dramatised over a number of plays, starting at the conspiracy and entry into Jerusalem and culminating in the burial and guarding of the sepulchre. Over this sequence, Christ sustains many injuries to his body, as he is struck, beaten, whipped, and pierced. Since devotion to the wounds of Christ was so strong, the number of wounds his body receives is an essential aspect of meditation on his suffering. Whilst the five wounds sustained during the crucifixion played an important role in Christian devotion, so did the numerous wounds Christ received at his scourging. Some sources describe the number of these wounds as being 5,475, such as in the following fifteenth-century poem:

The nowmer of Jhesu Cristes woundes
Ar fyve thowsande foure hondreth sixty and fyfteene
The whilk in his body war felt and sene.³⁵⁴

The number of these wounds has a defining role in meditation on Christ's suffering. For this reason, it is valuable to consider that the number of wounds may alter in the performance of the Passion. In play-texts and performances, Christ could be represented with a large number of wounds at the scourging but only five during scenes of the crucifixion. Dramatising only the five wounds in spite of the significant damage inflicted upon Christ in the scourging would make the meaning of these wounds (and their signification) distinct for the audience – this may be specific to his death and sacrifice for mankind or even as proof of his resurrection.

The Spectacle of the Scourging in the N-Town *Trial Before Pilate and Herod*:

In the N-Town *Trials Before Pilate and Herod* [NT. *TBPH*] the physical violence used against Christ's body becomes a visual spectacle for the audience through his silence, making it dramatically important among the range of scourging plays. Having been struck and beaten about the head in the previous play of the *Trial Before Annas and Cayphas*, the violence against Christ intensifies as he is physically beaten with whips until his body is visually bloody.

Although in many plays Christ verbally responds to the Jews or Torturers that inflict suffering upon him, the silence of Christ in the *Trials Before Pilate and Herod* casts him in a role that only receives pain and presents the visual impact of this violence upon his body. Christ's silence has the dramatic effect of portraying his divinity, for as Woolf has argued, it 'becomes a magnificent symbol of the inexpressible'.³⁵⁵ It also allows the audience to meditate on Christ's suffering and sacrifice, whilst confronted with his increasingly wounded body. In addition to being theatrically significant, the silence of Christ is also theologically significant. Woolf has noted how the play reflects his silence in the gospel accounts, although he does not always remain completely silent in the drama.

³⁵⁴ "The number of Jesu Christs wounds", *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, eds. Linne Mooney, Daniel Mosser, Elizabeth Solopova, Deborah Thorpe and David Radcliffe, (n.d.), <<http://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=5425>> The poem is contained in Additional MS 37049, fol. 24r, from the British Library.

³⁵⁵ Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*, pp. 256-257.

As Christ is brought out for trial before King Herod on his throne, his silence prompts anger from Herod leading him to use physical violence against his body as an interrogation technique:

What? Spek, I say! Thu foullyng, evyl mote thu fare!
Loke up! The devyl mote thee cheke!
Serys, bete his body with scorgys bare
And asay to make hym for to speke!
(NT. *TBPH*, ll. 229-232).³⁵⁶

After Herod speaks these lines, the stage directions indicate that Christ is stripped of his clothes, revealing his body before his flesh is beaten: [s.d. Here thei pulle of Jhesus clothis and betyn hym with whyppys] (NT. *TBPH*, aft. l. 236). Removing the clothes of Christ would have allowed the audience to see the visual impact of the whipping upon Christ's body, emphasising his pain and suffering. The dramatic purpose of physically performing the wounds of Christ as they are made allows the audience to meditate on his wounded body through visual confrontation. This display parallels affective images of the wounded body of Christ or Christ as the Man of Sorrows that the audience could have encountered in medieval visual culture and also echoes written forms of meditation on Christ's passion that provided extensive details of his scourging, while guiding the emotional responses of the viewer or reader. For instance, the Passion was a popular subject in stained-glass windows, as can be seen in fig. 8, which depicts the scourging. The silence of Christ has the effect of intensifying the spectacle of his suffering, both visually and aurally, allowing the audience to contemplate Christ's pain through these two senses.

As Christ is beaten with the whips, Judeus 2 taunts him for his silence:

Jhesus, thi bonys we shal not breke,
But we shal make thee to skype!
Thu hast lost thi tonge? Thu mayst not speke?
Thu shalt asay now of this whippe!
(NT. *TBPH*, 237-240).

³⁵⁶ *Trials Before Pilate and Herod*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-30-death-of-judas-trials-before-pilate-and-herod>> All further references are to this edition.

The horror of this action is intensified in the stark contrast between the playful taunts of Judeus 2 and the mutilation of Christ's body. This tension is heightened by Christ's silence, which also serves to portray his strength and resistance to Herod's demands that he speak. Following further taunting from Judeus 3, the stage directions indicate that the physical impact of the whips appears upon Christ's body dramatising the wounds that he now bears: [s.d. thei han betyn hym tyl he is alle blody] (NT. *TBPH*, aft. l. 244). This effect could have been achieved with body paint applied to the actor playing Christ from the whips directly. Performance evidence from the Coventry Smiths' Passion pageant indicates that the actor playing Christ wore a 'gyrdyll' and a 'cote', which is mentioned in reference to its 'payntyng & gylldyng', although there is no detail of what the 'cote' may have looked like.³⁵⁷ Davidson has noted that this had the dual function of depicting Christ's naked body in addition to providing a surface for simulated wounds.³⁵⁸

The bleeding body of Christ also features in the comparable play of the Towneley *Scourging* [T. *Scourging*], which specifically highlights Christ's flow of blood as the Second Torturer describes that: 'the bloode downe glyde' (T. *Scourging*, l. 137).³⁵⁹ As the Man of Sorrows in the Towneley *Resurrection* play [T. *RotL*], Christ personally reflects on the blood and wounds of his body in reference to the scourging:

Behold my body how lues it dang
with knottys of whyppys and scourges strang;
As stremes of well the bloode out sprang
On euery syde
(T. *RotL*, ll. 274-277).³⁶⁰

In this play, Christ also draws attention to the number of wounds he possesses as the Man of Sorrows: 'four hundreth woundys and fyue thowsand / here may thou se' (T.

³⁵⁷ As cited in: *Records of Early English Drama*: Coventry, ed. Richard W. Ingram (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 231.

³⁵⁸ See note to line 342: *The Second Trial Before Pilate*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011),
<<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-33-the-second-trial-before-pilate>>

³⁵⁹ *The Scourging*, in: *The Towneley Plays*, ed. George England (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 247.

³⁶⁰ *The Resurrection of the Lord*, in: *The Towneley Plays*, ed. George England (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 314.

RotL, ll. 282-283). This significant number of wounds indicates that the audience's meditation on Christ's body would be focussed on the extent of his suffering. As the number of wounds was an important devotional focus, images of the scourging (such as in fig. 9), also depicted his body completely covered with wounds. It is difficult to tell whether the action in which Christ is beaten provided enough time to completely cover his body in bloody wounds – if Christ was only beaten for a short period, the stage directions in which Christ's clothing is removed could have revealed a large number of wounds already underneath. Either way, full and graphic depiction of the bloody wounds as they are inflicted seems to be a crucial element of the dramatisation.

As Christ's blood was a central aspect of medieval religious devotion, the performance of his bleeding body would have elicited an emotional response from the audience. Looking at contemporary responses to the scourging of Christ, Julian of Norwich makes reference to his heavy bleeding:

And after this I saw, beholding the body plentiously bleding in seming of the scorgyng, as thus: The faire skynne was brokyn ful depe into the tender flesh with sharpe smyting al about the sweete body. So plenteously the hote blode ran oute that there was neither sene skynne ne wound, but as it were al blode. And whan it come wher it should a fallen downe, than it vanyshid.³⁶¹

This vision reveals to Julian 'how it likith God rather and better to wash us in His blode from synne than in water, for His blode is most pretius'.³⁶² Thus, the vision of the scourging allows Julian to contemplate the divine properties of Christ's blood as a composite of God. Another response to the scourging of Christ can be found in Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. Love's response to the scourging of Christ focuses on the horror and distortion of his appearance caused by the scourging, for he describes how: 'there was none semlynesse nor beutye in hym, and we helde him as foule as a leprose manne'.³⁶³ This is suggestive of the effects that drama is trying to create, thus demonstrating the similarities between meditation and drama in evoking the detail of Christ's extensive suffering.

³⁶¹ Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, Part 1, Chapter 12. ll. 473-477.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, Part 1, Chapter 12.

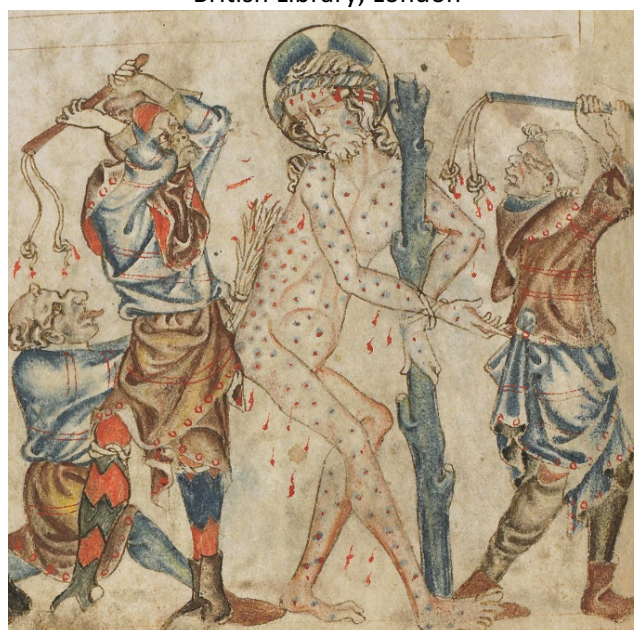
³⁶³ Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, p. 171.

Christ's silence in the *Trials Before Pilate and Herod* in his endurance of pain portrays his control, resistance and authority over Herod in defying his command to speak. The wounds also signify his willing sacrifice and martyrdom for mankind, and the dramatisation of his bloodshed shows Christ's humanity and divinity. This allows the audience to meditate on the cruelty committed against Christ, in addition to the redemption he will subsequently achieve.

Figure 8: The Flagellation of Christ
13th Century, French or English (Stained Glass Panel) V&A Museum, London



Figure 9: The Scourging of Christ
14th Century, English (Holkham Bible Picture Book, Add. MS 47682, f. 29v)
British Library, London



Contemplation of the Five Future Wounds in *Satan and Pilate's Wife*:

A particularly noteworthy feature of the N-Town play of *Satan and Pilate's Wife* [NT. *S&PW*], is the attention that Satan gives to the five wounds of Christ before they have been inflicted. This allows the audience to contemplate Christ's wounded body from the perspective of Satan. Satan demonstrates his own responsibility for the impending death of Christ as he specifically describes the crucifixion that he has orchestrated:

I have do made redy his cros that he shal dye upon,
And thre nayles to takke hym, with that he shal not styrtle!
Be he nevyr so holy, he shal not fro me gon,
But with a sharpe spere, he shal be smet to the herte!
(NT. *S&PW*, ll. 25-28).³⁶⁴

Each of the five wounds is referenced as Satan describes the exact crucifixion that Christ will endure. Although the nails in Christ's hands would have been a standard aspect of crucifixion, Satan also makes reference to the fifth wound of Christ, when a spear pierced his heart. It is significant that the audience's first encounter with these wounds is in words rather than in the physical action of the play. This is in contrast to the previous play, the *Trials Before Pilate and Herod*, in which the wounds of Christ's body were visibly represented to bleed. The changing method of contemplating the wounds allows the audience to meditate on their significance in the conflict between Christ and Satan, and to understand the victory Christ achieved against Satan in the very wounds that Satan desired to inflict. Satan believes that he causes Christ's death, not realising that this is God's divine plan. Thus, Satan's foresight into Christ's impending wounds and death is important as part of the patristic 'abuse-of-power' theory of redemption. This theory posits that:

When Adam and Eve fell into original sin, Satan was permitted to inflict death on them and all mankind and hold them captive in hell. Christ born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary was not subject to that law of death. Satan, however, was deceived by the human nature of Christ, and, in bringing about His death,

³⁶⁴ *Satan and Pilate's Wife*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-31-satan-and-pilates-wife-second-trial-before-pilate>> All further references are to this edition.

abused his power, and lost the souls in hell.³⁶⁵

This theory of redemption thus provides a narrative of blame for Satan and foretells the redemption of mankind through the fatal wounds of Christ's body. Satan's speech from lines 25-28 ironically evokes the *arma Christi* in his intention to destroy Christ's body. Yet the audience would have been familiar with the *arma Christi* as devotional objects that also defended Christ and symbolised his victory over death and the devil. Thus, Christ's future wounds as a symbol of triumph over evil, help to convey Satan's ignorance of God's divine plan.

The Suffering of Christ in the York *Crucifixio Christi*:

The York play of the *Crucifixio Christi* [Y. CC] dramatises Christ enduring prolonged suffering at the hands of the soldiers who attempt to nail him to the cross. As the initial holes made in the cross 'failis a foote and more' (Y. CC, l. 107), this delays the action of the crucifixion while Christ's body is stretched to fit. Christ's body also has to be extended in the *N-Town Plays*, and the late-thirteenth-century poem of the *Northern Passion*.³⁶⁶ The first soldier suggests: 'Faste in a corde / And tugge hym to, by toppe and taile' (Y. CC, ll. 113-114). Consequently, the soldiers are directly responsible for prolonging the torture of Christ. In delaying the nailing of Christ to the cross, the dramatic tension is heightened for the audience. Considering that the crucifixion happens after the extensive suffering endured by the body of Christ, the dramatic tension has already mounted up to this climactic and symbolic event.

Through the soldiers' detailed and evocative language of arranging Christ's body for the crucifixion, every moment of his suffering is suggested to the audience. As the soldiers anticipate wounding Christ, the First Soldier describes the force needed to strike a nail through his body as he commands: 'Strike on than harde' (Y. CC, l. 101). Similarly, the Second Soldier explains in detail the physical mutilation 'Thurgh bones and senous' (Y. CC, l. 103) that his body will endure.

As the Soldiers attempt to secure Christ to the cross, they are likely to have obscured the sight of his body. Delaying the crucifixion would therefore allow the

³⁶⁵ Timothy Fry, "The Unity of the Ludus Coventriae", *Studies in Philology* 48(3) (1951): pp. 529.

³⁶⁶ *Crucifixio Christi*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-35-crucifixio-christi>> All further references are to this edition.

audience to identify with the suffering of Christ through what they hear before his wounded body is displayed before them. At this point of the play, four of the five wounds of the crucifixion are accounted for in this extensive portrayal of how the wounds were made; how long it took to fasten Christ to the cross; the force needed to penetrate Christ's bones and sinews, and the suffering experienced by Christ in being physically stretched to meet the holes. In this first section of the play, the wounds of Christ are placed in the context of his divine endurance of suffering, as well as the cruelty and lack of humanity of his torturers through handling his crucifixion as carpentry.

Once Christ is mounted successfully upon the cross and displayed before the audience, he draws attention to his wounds, affecting their signification from this part of the play onwards:

Al men that walkis by waye or strete,
Takes tente ye schalle no travayle tyne.
Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
And fully feele nowe, or ye fyne,
Yf any mournyng may be meete
Or myscheve mesured unto myne
(Y. CC, ll. 253-258).

Here, Christ refers to the example he intends to make of his body to all people, by inviting them to look upon his head, hands and feet. These lines encapsulate the purpose of the play for the audience, as the dramatisation of the crucifixion provides a form of meditation on the physical suffering and pain of Christ's wounded body. As these lines specifically refer to the sorrow of Christ, empathising with this sorrow is clearly another purpose of meditating on his wounded body.

Christ also uses the focus upon his body as an opportunity to offer mercy to the soldiers who tortured him. This contrast between the suffering that the soldiers cause him and the kindness with which he responds allows his wounds to signify his mercy, which is an important devotional aspect of his wounds in redeeming the sins of mankind. Christ also emphasises his own role as a figure of redemption in his concern for the soldiers' souls:

Forgiffis thes men that dois me pyne.
What thai wirke wotte thai noght.
Therefore, my Fadir, I crave
Latte nevere ther synnys be sought,
But see their saules to save
(Y. CC, ll. 260-264).

Thus, the wounds of Christ become symbolic of his suffering, sacrifice, mercy, and redemption.

In contemporaneous texts that meditated on the Passion of Christ, such as *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* and the writings of Richard Rolle, both describe the visual spectacle of Christ's crucifixion from the perspective of a witness. In particular, the mystic Richard Rolle provides an account of the final hours of Christ's life in great detail, describing how:

I se in my soule how reufully þou gost: þi body is so bloody, so rowed and so bledderyd; þi heere mevyth with þe wynde, clemyd with þe blood; þi lovely face so wan and so bolnyd with bofetynge and with betyng, with spyttyng, with spowtyng; þe blood ran þerewith, þat grysyt in my syt; so lothly and so wlatome þe Jues han þe mad, þat a myself art þou lyckere þan a clene man. Ðe cross is so hevy so hye and so stark, þat þei hangyd on þi bare bac trossyd so harde.³⁶⁷

Here, Rolle's vision of Christ is intensely focused on the blood covering his body, his wounds, and the violence used against him. He also meditates on Christ from the perspective of looking up at him upon the crucifix. Rolle's account reveals the importance of the detail about Christ's suffering during his crucifixion to medieval religious devotion and meditation, thus justifying his long, drawn-out suffering in the York *Crucifixio Christi*. Rolle's vivid description of Christ's body also gives us an idea of the effects that drama is trying to create. Since the late-medieval text *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyng* specifically refers to audiences of 'men and wymen seinge the passioun of Crist and of his seintis ... movyd to compassion and devocion, wepinge bitere teris', it is clear that representations of the physically wounded Christ were

³⁶⁷ Richard Rolle, *English Writings of Richard Rolle: Hermit of Hampole*, ed. Hope Emily Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p. 21.

particularly directed at eliciting emotional responses of sympathy, sorrow and compassion.³⁶⁸

The dramatisation of Christ's prolonged suffering during the crucifixion defines his wounds by the extensive physical suffering and sacrifice he endures for mankind. This provokes affective meditation on the humanity of Christ in his wounded body in addition to portraying his divine qualities in his ability to endure so much suffering. It is Christ's own response to his wounds that causes them to change signification over the play, symbolising his sorrow and his mercy. This demonstrates the multivalent signification of Christ's wounds in medieval drama.

Parallel Wounds and Affective Piety in the N-Town *Crucifixion*:

The N-Town *Crucifixion* [NT. *Crucifixion*] portrays the Virgin Mary experiencing an affective response to Christ that is deeply intimate in her role as his mother. The wound of her bursting heart, a metaphor she uses for her emotion, also parallels and is symbolic of Christ's side wound. This parallel results in a shared signification: when she presents her emotion to the audience it is provoked to empathise with her, and thus to feel love, compassion and grief for Christ. The Virgin Mary's metaphor of emotional wounding in this crucifixion play places it between my categories of the wounds of Christ and sacred wounds.

Mary expresses her compassion and grief for Christ as she exclaims: 'A! Out on my hert! Whi brest thu nowth?' (NT. *Crucifixion*, l. 97).³⁶⁹ Although Christ is still alive upon the cross, Mary welcomes her own death since she will soon lose her son: 'A, deth, deth, deth! Why wylt thu not me kyll?' (NT. *Crucifixion*, l. 100). Thus, Christ's wounded body becomes the devotional focus for Mary's affective response as she empathises with his suffering through her own body. As medieval perspectives on Mary's grief for Christ frame it as an intense form of martyrdom, it is significant that she welcomes her own death in this play. For instance, in the twelfth century Richard of Saint Victor describes how Mary:

³⁶⁸ As cited in: Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, *Street Scenes: Late Medieval Acting and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 29.

³⁶⁹ *The Crucifixion*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-32-procession-to-calvary-crucifixion>> All further references are to this edition.

was adorned with martyrdom. For a sword, not of matter but of grief, pierced her soul. The martyrdom by which she suffered was more painful than iron.³⁷⁰

Here, the metaphor of Mary's emotional wound is extended with a comparison to a sword wound martyring her. Richard of Saint Victor also speculates on the pain of the Virgin Mary in comparison to the other Christian martyrs:

Among the martyrs, the greatness of their love alleviated the pain of their suffering, but the more the Virgin loved, the more she suffered.³⁷¹

Mary's emphasis upon her own heart in this play reflects her love for Christ as a mother, which parallels the love of God and Christ for mankind. Her emotions also parallel those of Christ himself during the crucifixion, as her heart is breaking through sorrow:

A, my Sovereyn Lord, why whylt thou not speke
To me that am thi modyr, in peyn for thi wrong?
A, hert, hert! Why whylt thou not breke,
That I were out of this sorwe so stronge?
(NT. *Crucifixion*, ll. 141-144).

Here, Mary's expression of sorrow draws devotional attention to Christ's bleeding heart. The audience's emotional sympathy for the Virgin Mary in this play is thus an affective response in identifying with her sorrow and love for Christ. Through her emotional wound, Mary becomes an intermediary to Christ's suffering.

As Christ responds to Mary in her grief, he justifies his death to her as the will of God for the redemption of mankind:

Now, syn it is the wyl of my Fadyr, it shuld thus be.
Why shuld it dysplese thee, modyr, now my deth so sore?
And for to suffre al this for man, I was born of thee,

To the blys that man had lost, man agen to restore
(NT. *Crucifixion*, ll. 153-156).

³⁷⁰ As cited in: Dale, *Relics, Prayer, and Politics*, p. 61.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

This allows Christ's side wound to develop further signification in this play, for his death brings salvation through his suffering. At this point of the play, Christ would only be depicted with four of the five crucifixion wounds, and it is more than likely that his wounded body would have been presented as visually bloody. Whilst Christ's response to Mary has the appearance of alleviating the emotional suffering of his mother, it also allows him to explain to the audience why his death provides mankind's salvation. This affects the signification of his wounds since Christ defines his body according to its greater purpose.

Like Mary, the language that Christ employs to reflect upon his death also has metaphorical connotations of an emotional wound to the heart:

Holy Fadyr, in hefly se,
I comende my spyryte to thee,
For here now hendyth my fest.
I shal go sle the fende, that freke.
For now, myn herte begynneth to breke
(NT. *Crucifixion*, ll. 215-219).

Here, Christ refers to his emotions, as it is not until a later N-Town play that he endures the side wound which physically pierces his heart. Thus, Christ's breaking heart emphasises his love for mankind. As this wound parallels the emotional wound of the Virgin Mary, it creates a sustained and extended symbol of the emotionally and physically wounded heart.

Even though the wound of the Virgin Mary is only a metaphor for her grief for Christ, it was taken so seriously that her suffering was compared to martyrdom. Since Mary's bursting and breaking heart expresses her grief, this metaphorical wound parallels the physical wounds of both Christ and the Christian martyrs, as well as the love of the martyrs for Christ. It also demonstrates to the audience the very response it should have to Christ's wounds. Thus, physical and metaphorical wounds are given multivalent signification for both Christ and the Virgin Mary in the N-Town play of the *Crucifixion*.

Wounds as Proof of Christ's Resurrection in York and N-Town:

In the York *Doubting Thomas* [Y. DT] and the N-Town *Appearance to Thomas* [NT. AT], the wounds of Christ provide proof of his resurrection. There is a definitive focus on wounds in both plays, and it is the touching of Christ's wounds specifically that is connected to a heightened devotional faith in his divine immortality as well as his sacrifice for mankind. The signification of the wounds and the focus upon them is fascinating to explore in both of these plays since Thomas authenticates the wounds before the audience, confirming the corporeal reality of the resurrected Christ in an exploration of the natural doubts they might have in the resurrection. In both plays, we can consider how the use of food or sensory metaphors in relation to Christ's wounds evokes the sacrament of the Eucharist, and whether this is another way in which Christ's wounded body appeals directly to the experiences of the audience.

In the N-Town *Appearance to Thomas* Cleophas and Luke's doubts of Christ's resurrection are raised through the physical fact of his death but settled by verbal reasoning. In this play, it is only Thomas who touches Christ's side wound. In the York play of *Doubting Thomas*, however, it is touch alone that is the proof. Thus, the emphasis on Thomas is slightly different between the plays: even though he wants to personally experience the wounds of Christ, in the York *Doubting Thomas* he cannot overcome his disbelief in the resurrection even though the other disciples have touched the wounds before him.

York *Doubting Thomas*:

After he first witnesses the resurrected Christ, Peter describes how his body: 'Shynand so bright' (Y. DT, l. 22).³⁷² As John also remarks on: 'the light it broght' (Y. DT, l. 26), both characters suggest that Christ appears to emanate light. Since a number of characters touch the wounds of his resurrected body in this play, we know that his wounds would also have been visible. This results in the signification of Christ's immortality, since the divinity of his wounded body would have been portrayed through its radiance.

³⁷² *Doubting Thomas*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-41-doubting-thomas>> All further references are to this edition.

Christ's radiant and wounded body could have been performed using a white leather jerkin scored with the marks of his wounds. There is evidence for such an item in the York pageant of *Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene* as well as a diadem, which would have conveyed Christ's divinity.³⁷³ The scoring of a surface surrounding the actor's body would have allowed the leather jerkin painted with wounds to be penetrated, creating the illusion of touching Christ's wounds. As only the five wounds of Christ are mentioned, this indicates the significance of his crucifixion wounds in particular, rather than the vast number of wounds sustained in the scourging. These five wounds allow the resurrected Christ to be identified, since the side wound is unique to his crucifixion – neither of the criminals crucified alongside him received this wound.

As Christ reappears before Peter, John and Jacob, he highlights the visual spectacle of his body, and makes reference to the fact that its appearance has not changed since his death:

I ame Criste, ne drede you nought,
Her may ye se
The same body that has you bought
Uppon a tre
(Y. DT, ll. 45-48).

Christ also draws attention to its wounded and mutilated condition as he endeavours to convince Peter, John and Jacob of his resurrection. Inviting the characters closer, Christ directs them to experience the physical proof of his corporeal existence through the sight and touch of his five wounds:

Behalde and se myn handis and feete,
And grathely gropes my woundes wete
Al that here is;
Thus was I dight youre balis to beete
And bring to blis
(Y. DT, ll. 50-54).

It is significant that, in order to prove his identity, Christ must be physically entered through his fatal wounds, thus permeating the boundaries of his physical and

³⁷³ As cited in: Andrea Ria Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama, 1400-1642* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 39.

spiritual existence. Such an act also proves Christ's resurrection and divine immortality since his wounds continue to bleed after his death. As Christ continues to reflect upon his body, he compares the touch of his wounds to the taste of his pain: 'For youe thus was I revyn and rayst; / Therefore some of my payne ye taste' (Y. *DT*, ll. 85-86). Christ's mention of 'tasting' pain implies that the touch of the disciples is a form of affective piety, identifying with the suffering that he experienced in the Passion. The use of taste is also significant as the Eucharist involves drinking wine as the blood of Christ, and the disciples come into contact with his blood in touching his wounds. If Christ's pain can be 'tasted' through contact with his blood, this therefore suggests that the audience, too, can experience affective piety through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Even though Peter, John and Jacob explain to Thomas how Christ 'lete us fele his woundes fyve' (Y. *DT*, l. 141), he continues to doubt in the resurrection. The use of the word 'feel' here is notable, since in physically touching the wounds of Christ the disciples have also emotionally 'felt' his suffering (as Christ emphasises in his assertion that they tasted his pain). Yet, in his grief for Christ Thomas only reflects on his physical suffering through his wounds:

Wan was his wondis and wonderus wette,
With skelpis sore was he swongen, that swette,
All naked nailed thurgh hande and feete
(Y. *DT*, ll. 109-111).

The implication is that Thomas has not experienced faith in Christ's divinity – his failure to believe in his immortality undermines his faith in God. Consequently, Thomas demands the same physical proof of the resurrection:

What, leve felawes, late be youre fare.
Till that I see his body bare
And sithen my fyngir putte in thare
Within his hyde
And fele the wounde the spere did schere
Right in his syde,
Are schalle I trowe no tales between
(Y. *DT*, ll. 157-163).

Christ responds to Thomas' doubt by inviting him to touch his wounds, making reference to their bloody appearance:

Beholde my woundis are bledand,
Here in my side putte in thi hande
And fele my woundis and undirstande
That this is I
(Y. *DT*, ll. 175-178).

Here, Christ associates a state of understanding with touching his wounds, and consequently Thomas is filled with heightened devotional strength. The transformation of Thomas' doubts upon contact with the blood and body of Christ is a crucial exploration of the audience's own doubts in the resurrection, aiming to resolve their issues of belief. The idea that spiritual faith is achieved through contact with Christ's body is important in the audience's own physical encounter of his blood and body in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Thus, Thomas' doubts engage the audience with the wounded body of Christ spiritually, emotionally and liturgically.

In the York *Doubting Thomas*, Christ's wounds act as a means of experiencing an affective response to Christ. For the characters, this affective response occurs through the senses, in tasting Christ's pain and feeling his wounds. As the audience encounter these emotional and spiritual reactions in witnessing and meditating on these sensory experiences, their own responses are shaped in the same way. At the same time, Christ's multivalent wounds are also a symbol of his resurrection and divine immortality, and his glowing body highlights his divinity.

The N-Town *Cleophas and Luke; Appearance to Thomas*:

In the first section of the N-Town *Cleophas and Luke* [NT. *C&L*], Cleophas and Luke discuss the mutilated body of Christ as they mourn his death:

The Jewys were redy, hym for to qwelle,
With skorgys, bete out all his blood!
(NT. *C&L*, ll. 21-22).³⁷⁴

³⁷⁴ *Cleophas and Luke; The Appearance to Thomas*, in: *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-38-cleophas-and-luke-appearance-to-thomas>> All further references are to this edition.

Here, Luke draws attention to Christ's extensive loss of blood as physical proof of his death. This argument focuses on the physical impossibility of Christ's resurrection, and it is this logical reasoning that informs their disbelief. As Christ asks to join Cleophas and Luke (with his identity initially concealed from them), he challenges their scepticism with Old Testament prophecy:

Bothe Moyses and Aaron and othyr mo
In Holy Scrypture, ye may rede it.
Of Crystis deth, thei spak also,
And how he shuld ryse out of his pitt
(NT. *C&L*, ll. 97-100).

However, the physical fact of Christ's death continues to be used as an argument that he is no longer alive, for Cleophas argues:

The Jewys on hym, they were so wood
That to his herte, a spere they pyght!
He bled owt all his herte blood.
How shulde he, thanne, ryse with myght?
(NT. *C&L*, ll. 125-128).

Cleophas and Luke emphasise that Christ died as a human being, but fail to understand how he is alive as God. They become convinced in Christ's resurrection when they realise that their hearts are burning with love for him after he departs (NT. *C&L*, ll. 218-219). Cleophas describes Christ's speech as being 'to me food' (NT. *C&L*, l. 197), thus implying the spiritual nourishment that he provided, changing their perspectives on the resurrection. It is also significant that Cleophas and Luke develop faith through reasoning based upon the prophecies, as well as in analogous examples of life after death. This is in contrast to Thomas, who refuses to believe without tangible evidence. In the *Appearance to Thomas* section (l. 217 onwards), Thomas' doubts are also centred on the physical evidence of Christ's death for he asks:

How shulde a deed man that deed lay in grave
With qwyk flesche and blood to lyve ageyn ryse?
(NT. *AT*, ll. 303-304).

Although Thomas' scepticism matches Cleophas and Luke's, even they cannot convince him in the resurrection using the same reasoning presented to them. Instead, Thomas must have physical experience of the crucifixion wounds:

I may nevyr beleve these woundyr merveles
Tyl that I have syght of every grett wounde
And putt in my fyngyr in place of the nayles
(NT. AT, ll. 321-323).

Christ then invites Thomas to touch his wounds, and it is with this touch of his precious blood that he develops faith in the resurrection:

More feythful than I, ther may no man be,
For myn hand have I wasch in thi precyous blode
(NT. AT, ll. 347-348).

Thomas is the only character that touches the side wound of Christ in the N-Town *Appearance to Thomas*, thus it is through his hand that the miracle of the resurrection is authenticated before the audience. Following this transformation, he highlights his own incapacity to have faith in the resurrection through words alone:

The prechyng of Petir myght not converte me
Tyll I felyd the wound that the spere dyde cleve.
I trustyd nevyr he levyd that deed was on a tre
Tyll that his herte blood dede renne in my sleve
(NT. AT, ll. 377-380).

Here, Thomas specifically draws attention to the transformative effect of Christ's blood upon his spiritual beliefs. This emphasis on Christ's blood is also significant in the context of the Eucharist. The sacrament is evoked earlier within the play, as Cleophas compares the words of Christ to food, and Christ shares bread with both Cleophas and Luke. In turn, this suggests Thomas' lack of spiritual nourishment in his incapacity for faith through Christ's words, whereas it is through Christ's blood that he is eventually transformed. As in the York *Doubting Thomas*, Thomas' doubt is connected to the Eucharist and therefore the physical experiences the audience themselves have with Christ's body and blood. In addition to the signification of Christ's wounds as a symbol of his resurrection and divine immortality, Thomas'

contact with them is the means through which the audience can understand these aspects of Christ.

The Signification of Christ's Wounds at Doomsday in the York *Doomsday*:

As Deus, a composite character of the Father and the Son,³⁷⁵ Christ draws a good deal of attention to his wounds in the York *Doomsday* play [Y. *Doomsday*]. But whilst the body of Christ continues to bear the wounds of the crucifixion, the emphasis upon them is different. Consequently, his wounds have a different signification in the context of this play.

As Christ returns to earth in order to pass judgement, the attention he draws to his wounded body is used symbolically to signify that it is now too late for repentance and redemption. Reflecting upon the wounds he has endured, Christ makes reference to his sacrifice for mankind:

Here may ye see my woundes wide
The whilke I tholed for youre mysdede
Thurgh harte and heed, foote, hande, and hide
Nought for my gilte butt for youre nede
(Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 245-248).³⁷⁶

Christ's emphasis on the visibility of his body suggests the physical display of his wounds to the audience, reminding them of his previous suffering rather than asking for an affective response. God also highlights the visibility of these wounds earlier within the play when he describes:

Ther schall thei see the woundes fyve
That my Sone suffered for them all
(Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 71-72).

These wounds were displayed in Christ's costume, which seems to have combined the human wounded body with symbols of divine glory. The York Mercer's 1433

³⁷⁵ In this play the role of Deus is a conflation of the identities of both Christ and God, for both use the first person in relation to aspects of their own identity. It is for reasons of clarity that I therefore refer to God and Christ separately throughout this discussion.

³⁷⁶ *Doomsday*, in: *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-47-doomsday>> All further references are to this edition.

inventory³⁷⁷ of the costumes and props used in the play provides evidence of the: 'Array for god that ys to say a Sirke wounded a diadem With a veserne [mask] gilted'.³⁷⁸ The 'Sirke wounded' was a garment worn next to the skin that displayed the five wounds and was worn in addition to a gold mask and a crown, thus displaying Christ's humanity and divinity concurrently. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Christ's wounds were still bleeding in this play, underneath or surrounding the 'Sirke wounded', it is possible that red paint might have been used to add definition to the wounds. As a composite figure of God and Christ, Christ's wounds possess a different signification in this play. Whilst the wounds of the crucifixion portray Christ's humanity and the humanity that God took in the form of Christ, the symbols of divine glory convey the divinity and immortality of both God and Christ.

The above reference to the suffering of Christ as God's son illustrates the sacrifice that both of them made through his body, and the moral debt of mankind to honour this sacrifice. For instance, earlier in the play God highlights the moral failings of man and his inability to prepare his soul for judgement:

Ilke a day ther mirroure may thei se,
Yitt thynke thei noght that thei schall dye
(Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 51-52).

Similarly, as judge, Christ also puts the suffering of his body into the context of man's moral debt. He highlights this debt in posing the rhetorical question:

All this I suffered for thi sake.
Say, man, what suffered thou for me?
(Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 275-276).

Christ's consistent use of 'thou' and 'thi' appeals directly to the audience as individuals, emphasising his sacrifice to them personally. As Christ reinforces this within the play, he continues to emphasise his wounds to the audience:

³⁷⁷ However, it is important to note that the inventory dates from at least 30 years before the play manuscript, so it is not certain that the costume would have applied to this version of the play. The evidence is nonetheless suggestive.

³⁷⁸ Richard Beadle, "The York Cycle", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 94.

Beholdis both body, bak, and side
How dere I bought youre brotherhede.
Thes bittir peynes I wolde abide
To bye you blisse thus wolde I bleede
(Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 249-252).

Christ's five wounds therefore become an accusation of man. Rather than inviting man to feel compassion for his suffering, Christ uses his wounds to blame mankind for not being prepared for judgement day. Thus, the wounds are also symbolic of human sin.

In addition to his wounds, the bloodshed of Christ is also reflected upon, suggesting that his wounds were visibly bloody:

Blody and bloo, as I was bette,
With croune of thorne, throsten full ill.
This spere unto my side was sette,
Myne harte bloode spared noght thei for to spill,
Manne, for thy love wolde I not lette
(Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 256-260).

The blood of the side wound has its own signification in this play, as Christ specifically associates this blood with his love for mankind. Since Christ is passing judgement upon the damned, his blood is therefore another accusation of the sins of mankind and man's lack of love for Christ.

Since there is so much emphasis on the wounds in the context of man's moral debt their principle signification is of Christ's sacrifice and the sins of man. The emotional context of the wounds as symbols of Christ's love and in framing the question 'what suffered thou for me?' (Y. *Doomsday*, ll. 275-276) prompts the audience to meditate on their own spiritual devotion and need for penitence through Christ's warning. Thus, the York *Doomsday* encourages the audience to behave morally throughout life, so as to honour the suffering and sacrifice that Christ endured for man's salvation.

Conclusion to the Wounds of Christ:

It is clear that the wounds of Christ have a multivalent signification in medieval drama. Over the course of these plays, the wounds of Christ are used as symbols of

his suffering, humanity, sacrifice, resistance, victory, divinity, sorrow, mercy, and immortality. His wounds are proof of his resurrection and an accusation of sin, and his blood is symbolic of his love for mankind and the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the N-Town play of the *Crucifixion* Christ's wounds are both physical and metaphorical. The metaphor of his breaking heart signifies his sorrow and love for mankind, and parallels the wound of grief endured by the Virgin Mary. As Mary's grief was responded to as a form of martyrdom, Christ's emotional wounds are used as a parallel to the physical wounds sustained by both himself and the martyrs.

Christ-Like Wounds and Sacred Wounds

The Naked Sick Man in *Bewnans Meriasek*:

The Middle Cornish play *Bewnans Meriasek* [BM], which concerns the life of the Cornish Saint Meriasek, covers his many miracles healing the disabled and impaired, including the Naked Sick Man (or Naked Man). Over a brief episode of the play, the Naked Man's putrid and afflicted body is used as a parallel to the wounded body of Christ.³⁷⁹ Despite his similarities to Christ's wounded body, the putridity of the Naked Man's wounds is in direct contrast to the sweet-smell that holy wounds can possess. Whilst this raises the possibility that the Naked Man's putrid body may be comparable to Henry of Grosmont's festering wounds of sin in the *Book of Holy Medicines*, importantly, there is no implication that the Naked Man is sinful or immoral. Instead, he is the embodiment of the conditions referred to by Christ in the gospel of *Matthew* (25) in being cold, naked, sick, and rejected by society. Despite his unpleasant wounds, the Naked Man is used as an example of the concept that Christ is in all people: something that is illustrated through the parallel between Christ's wounds and those of the Naked Man.

The first words of the Naked Man express his devotion to Christ and Christianity, by providing vivid details of the wounds suffered by Christ in the Passion:

God save you, good people!

³⁷⁹ This episode spans from lines 3031-3086 in *Bewnans Meriasek*.

For love of the Passion
Which Christ, a Virgin's son, bore,
A lance thrust into his heart,
Feet and hands nailed
On a cross between thieves,
With a crown of thorns crowned,
So that to his brains
Right truly the thorns entered
(*BM*, ll. 3031-3039).

In his understanding of Christ's wounds, the Naked Man qualifies himself as deserving of charity. As he then goes on to describe his own 'wounds full of filth' (*BM*, l. 3058), his stinking limbs (*BM*, l. 3061) and rotten body (*BM*, l. 3051), these conditions are framed by the description of Christ's body, providing a comparison between the two. Just as Christ is described to appear 'foule as a leprose manne' in Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, the Naked Man's body is dirty, decaying and repugnant.³⁸⁰ In his need and for the love of Christ, the Naked Man requests:

Now for love of him
Give ye me a garment to cover me,
I am naked and the wind is cold
(*BM*, ll. 3040-3042).

Here, the Naked Man's appeal highlights the visual parallel of his own exposed, wounded body with Christ as the Man of Sorrows. However, the Earl of Vannes rejects this request for charity, as he refers to the unpleasant state of the Naked Man's body:

O worthy man, cry on thy way,
It is not honourable for thee without exception
To come before lords:
And thou naked (and) thy body all broken.
I have not seen often
(One) more putrid in his limbs
(*BM*, ll. 3043-3048).

The Earl's prejudice shows his inability to see the obvious comparison between the wounded bodies of the Naked Man and Christ, or to understand that Christ is in

³⁸⁰ Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, p. 171.

everyone. In response, the Naked Man once again describes his physical condition after referring to the wounds of Christ, emphasising the parallel:

O for all the wound
Which Christ bore, left and right,
For salvation to the son of man!
My body is powerless,
Rotten, stricken are my veins
Not any son of a breast loves me
(*BM*, ll. 3049-3054).

Here, the Naked Man goes on to explain that he is rejected due to his repugnant body:

No one likes to give me a bed,
Stinking in my limbs
Because, right truly, I am
(*BM*, ll. 3060-3062).

The lack of love shown to the Naked Man by the Earl and others, in turn shows their inability to love Christ in all people. The Naked Man is specifically evocative of Christ's words in the gospel of *Matthew* (25:35-37): 'I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked and you covered me: sick, and you visited me'.³⁸¹ Here Christ illustrates the idea that he is in all people, and that kindness shown to others is an act of kindness to him. Since he is introduced as 'Naked Sick Man', the character is clearly designed to embody all of these needs represented in the gospel of *Matthew* (25).

Pitying his wounded body, Bishop Meriasek gives him his own clothes in his moment of need:

Thou shalt right truly have raiment,
Though I (myself) should now go nakedly.
Great pity it is to see thee,
Thy flesh putrid like rot
(*BM*, ll. 3063-3066).

Meriasek's empathy for the Naked Man's suffering can be interpreted as an affective response to Christ. Whilst the Bishop serves Christ through his charity, he is also an

³⁸¹ *The Gospel of Matthew, The Douay-Rheims Bible Online*, ed. Richard Challoner (2013), <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/47001.htm>> 25:35-37.

intermediary to Christ in his ability to cure the Naked Man of his putrid physical condition, praying to Christ to heal him:

Jesu, lord of salvation,
Heal this man without a salve!
Take raiment over thee clearly
So that thou mayst comfort thyself
(*BM*, ll. 3077-3080).

In response, the Naked Man declares:

Healed for me in every limb,
On my body is not a wound,
The putrid flesh already
Whole and diseaseless it is truly
(*BM*, ll. 3083-3086).

It is not clear whether the Naked Man displays his healed body, or if he only indicates that it is healed beneath his clothing. The affected body and limbs of the Naked Man are consistently emphasised, but it is hard to see how signs of the wounds could be instantly removed in performance. Thus, we can speculate that either the Naked Man does not display his healed body to the audience, or that the clothes put onto him allow him to display the image of such a body.

In *Bewnans Meriasek*, the wounded body of the Naked Man acts as a visual parallel to Christ as the Man of Sorrows, as well as an emotional parallel to the human suffering Christ shares in the gospel of *Matthew* (25). Thus, Christ's wounds are evoked visually and emotionally throughout the play.

Parallel Wounds in the Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine*:

The Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine* [*MP St. C*] is a Middle German play that was composed and performed in the province of Thuringia during the mid-fourteenth century. Although many martyrs' plays were composed and performed in the British Isles, such as the plays of St. Catherine, St. Thomas the Martyr, and St. Stephen, none of these texts survive.³⁸² This is why a translation of the Middle German *Play of*

³⁸² Darryll Grantley, "Saints' Plays", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 266.

St. Catherine will be examined as a substitute.³⁸³ The play concerns the martyrdom of St. Catherine, and follows a similar plot to the saint's hagiographical narrative in the *Golden Legend*. Throughout the play, the Emperor Maxentius attempts to disprove Christianity in a number of ways, from recruiting (non-Christian) learned scholars to persuade Catherine to give up such 'foolish thoughts' (*MP St. C*, l. 223), to creating a wheel of torture for her to endure, but he fails at every turn.³⁸⁴ After witnessing Catherine's courage, faith, and devotion to Christianity, the learned scholars and the Emperor's Queen convert to Christianity and are then killed, before Catherine herself is martyred. The play is a valuable source to explore wounds, mutilation and dismemberment since the death of each of these martyrs parallels Christ as well as other holy Christian martyrs in death.

Christ's Passion and the Parallel Tortures of St. Catherine:

It is the Devil that suggests to the Emperor Maxentius that Catherine's body should be tortured for her belief in Christianity. The Devil features very little in the play, but his role early on puts him in charge of its unfolding events.³⁸⁵ This allows the audience to see the Emperor as a symbolic enemy of God and Christianity. Due to her Christianity, the Devil advises Maxentius:

You must inflict many a torment
upon her body,
until she abandons her false teaching
and faithfully worships me
(*MP St. C*, ll. 92-95).

Here, the Devil proposes that her suffering will destroy her spiritual devotion and faith in Christianity. Her subsequent resistance in the face of her torture thus demonstrates her resistance not only to human rulers, but to the Devil's will. This symbolic resistance affects the signification of her wounded body, since Catherine's

³⁸³ The Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine* used the *Golden Legend* as a source in its composition. As the medieval drama of England also used this text as a source, it is possible that there could have been a degree of similarity between this play and the Middle English *St. Catherine* play.

³⁸⁴ *The Mühlhausen Play of St. Catherine*, in: *Medieval German Drama*, ed. and trans. Stephen Wright (Fairview: Pegasus Press, 2002), p. 133. All further references are to this edition.

³⁸⁵ This is comparable to the N-Town play of *Satan and Pilate's Wife*.

unwavering resistance throughout the play echoes Christ's own resistance during the Passion.

Medieval iconography demonstrates the unity between Catherine and Christ in the parallel tortures they suffer. The tradition of the mystical marriage of Catherine to Christ is recalled prior to her torture, for she emphasises: 'God has chosen me as his bride' (*MP St. C*, I. 316). This role of Catherine as the bride of Christ is important as a statement of her love, devotion and the dedication of her body and soul to Christ.

In her torture, Maxentius commands Catherine to take off her clothes before she is beaten with rods, providing a parallel with the scourging of Christ. This episode is not included in the *Golden Legend*. Although Wright notes: 'this particular torture has been added by the playwright' it is a traditional part of the legend represented in other sources, as can be seen in fig. 10.³⁸⁶ It provides an obvious visual comparison between the performance of the wounded bodies of Catherine and Christ, as can also be seen in fig. 11 from the same manuscript, depicting the scourging of Christ. Catherine's stoical endurance of torture creates a further parallel with Christ, for after her scourging, Cursates informs the King that:

I have done your will
and I have had the maiden
beaten severely with rods,
but she will not convert
(*MP St. C*, II. 324-327).

This enables the audience to identify with her pain through their meditation on Christ's own resistance and suffering.

Much emphasis is put on the beauty of Catherine as her flesh is exposed for torture, although there are no records of how this was performed. There is evidence of 'naked suits' in medieval performances, and Meredith and Tailby offer evidence of

³⁸⁶ See notes to: *The Mühlhausen Play of St. Catherine*, in: *Medieval German Drama*, ed. and trans. Stephen Wright (Fairview: Pegasus Press, 2002), p. 138.

an actress playing the role of St. Catherine in France.³⁸⁷ However, there is no conclusive evidence of women in female roles in England. It is also possible that her body might be partially concealed by an undergarment (as in fig. 10) rather than completely naked. Another image, fig. 12, from the fifteenth century, also displays the martyrdom of a female saint (Apollonia) in such an undergarment, at a theatrical performance. As with dramatisations of the scourging of Christ, bloody marks could be transferred upon Catherine's body by the rods. It is the impact of the violence upon her exposed and beautiful body that magnifies the cruelty it endures. Catherine's virginal body is also consistently associated with her purity, another symbol of her strength, resistance to sin, and spiritual perfection, but it is her wounds that signify her true devotion and spiritual strength.

After Catherine has been beaten, the Emperor's Queen decides to visit her in prison. Here, the stage directions indicate that Catherine is now emitting a shining light:

[s.d. they go to the prison cell, and on account of the overpowering brightness they fall down upon the ground as if dead] (*MP St. C*, aft. l. 358).

This brightness emanating from Catherine is comparable to the shining light of Christ's resurrected body in the York *Doubting Thomas*, which portrays his divinity. The fact that the light causes the Queen and Porphyrius to fall down is also comparable to the Jews in the N-Town *Betrayal*, indicating that the light is a sure sign of Catherine's sanctity. It is also noteworthy that both Catherine and Christ emit light following wounding, glorifying the physical suffering of their bodies. The bones of Christian martyrs in Roman catacombs were also thought to 'cast off a golden glow', illustrating how the sanctity the martyrs embodied was strongly connected to the physical suffering they endured.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ For evidence of "naked suits" see: Meg Twycross, "Beyond the picture theory: image and activity in medieval drama", *Word & Image* 4 (1988): pp. 607-617. For evidence of a girl playing St. Katherine in France see: Meredith and Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama*, p. 55.

³⁸⁸ Nuwer, "Meet the Fantastically Bejeweled Skeletons".

The suggestion that Catherine does not feel pain relates to medieval ideas about the martyrs' imperviousness to pain. Catherine demonstrates that she is willing to endure any act of suffering for God, for she declares:

I do not care about your tortures,
for God calls to me;
to Him I offer up my flesh and blood
in this act of suffering
(*MP St. C*, ll. 416-419).

However, Cursates interprets that Catherine's lack of pain is the reason she has not converted from Christianity:

This maiden Catherine
does not even feel the pain
that should make her turn to your law
and make an offering to your god
(*MP St. C*, ll. 422-425).

Consequently, Maxentius and Cursates attempt to intensify Catherine's suffering through the use of a specially designed wheel of torture, as a test in order to see:

whether or not she will still remain
unharmd by this immense torment
(*MP St. C*, ll. 432-433).

Thus, the pain of Catherine's body becomes the focus of disproving the validity of Christianity. This is another way in which Cursates and Maxentius endeavour to test God, but underestimate his power. In the *Golden Legend* the wheels are 'studded with iron saws and sharp-pointed nails' thus linking nails, a popular item in medieval devotion, to the martyrdoms of both Catherine and Christ.³⁸⁹ Even though Catherine is unharmd by the wheel, its potential to destroy her flesh with its 'sharp ... slashing blades' (*MP St. C*, l. 442), evokes her potential pain and mutilation.

It is significant that Catherine's final words before she is beheaded are evocative of the words of Christ as he is led to his crucifixion in the gospel of *Luke* (23:28) 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me', thus emphasising Catherine's

³⁸⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 724.

parallel to Christ.³⁹⁰ Before she is martyred, Catherine addresses the characters witnessing her death (as well as the audience):

I beseech you, all my children
who are gathered together here,
do not weep but be joyful:
the kingdom of heaven has been prepared for me
(*MP St. C*, ll. 634-637).

Catherine's command to be happy in her death shows her fearlessness in addition to suggesting her imperviousness to pain. Her body is buried directly after she is beheaded, but she continues to take a role in the play as she is crowned as a holy martyr. The Person of the Lord crowns Catherine after her death, which would allow a direct comparison to be drawn between their wounded bodies, as Christ may also have appeared with wounds. Christ takes Catherine as his spiritual bride as he places the eternal crown upon her head:

Come, my chosen bride,
and the beloved of my heart,
receive now as your reward
the eternal crown.
Since for my sake you have had
many kinds of torment,
and for the sake of righteousness
you were willing to suffer anguish and pain,
and you poured out your blood
indefatigably for the sake of my love
(*MP St. C*, ll. 670-679).

Here, Christ's words explain that Catherine has earned his love through her endurance of torture and martyrdom. Yet, his reference to Catherine's *willingness* to suffer pain suggests the possibility that she either did not feel anything or was able to resist the effects of pain. This highlights the power of God to take away the pain of the martyrs, as well as Catherine's spiritual devotion in enduring her martyrdom. Catherine then sings a responsory for the feasts of St. Agnes, St. Mary Magdalene, All Saints, and the Common Mass of the Virgins, which echo the words of Christ. The mystical marriage is highlighted once again in this responsory, and makes reference

³⁹⁰ *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Challoner, 23:28.

to the fact that she poured out her blood for the sake of his love. Thus, Catherine is consistently set up as a parallel to Christ to the very end of the play.

Like Christ, St. Catherine's wounds possess multivalent significations: as symbols of her suffering, sacrifice and devotion, her resistance (to Satan, Maxentius and sin), and her divinity (through her glowing). Her wounds also provide a parallel to the wounds of the Passion of Christ and the virgin martyrs. This is because St. Catherine, through her mystical marriage and the popularity of her saint's cult in late-medieval Germany, was perceived as almost equal to Christ in his divinity.

Figure 10: The Scourging of St. Catherine
14th Century, English (The Taymouth Hours, Yates Thompson MS 13, f. 16v)
British Library, London



Figure 11: The Scourging of Christ
14th Century, English (The Taymouth Hours, Yates Thompson MS 13, f. 120r)
British Library, London



Figure 12: The Martyrdom of St Apollonia
15th Century, French (Le Livre d'Heures d'Etienne Chevalier, MS 71, f. 39)
Musée Condé, Chantilly



The Torture and Martyrdom of the Queen and its Echo of St. Agatha:

The conversion of the Queen leads to her own torture and martyrdom, foreshadowing Catherine's (since they are both beheaded). Her conversion becomes apparent after she interprets the destruction of the wheel of torture designed for Catherine and the death of the torturers as punishment for the corruption of Maxentius' gods (*MP St. C*, I. 490). Notably, the Queen's death is also comparable to the martyrdom of St. Agatha for her breasts are mutilated before she is killed – Maxentius demands:

I swear by my gods:
if I cannot prevent you from committing this sin,
I will see to it that your breasts are torn off
(*MP St. C*, II. 494-496).

This is therefore another occasion that Maxentius unintentionally highlights the power of Christianity through the devotional strength of the martyrs. It is also significant that both St. Catherine and St. Agatha are virgin martyrs, as the symbolism of Agatha's own pure and virginal body evoked in the Queen's parallel torture and martyrdom echoes Catherine's own subsequent martyrdom.

Although there are no stage directions in the play which indicate when the Queen endures the torture to her breasts, it seems likely that this action would have been performed around the time Maxentius commands:

Now follow my instructions:
run a cord through her breasts
(*MP St. C*, II. 507-508).

As Maxentius commands one of the knights to 'Seize your lady' (*MP St. C*, I. 505), meaning the Queen, it is possible that she could have worn a body suit in the dramatisation of her torture, or that this action was performed on a dummy body. Meredith and Tailby offer evidence that dummy bodies were commonly required for the performances of beheadings or martyrdom in medieval drama, such as in the Majorca Judith and the Majorca saints play of Crispin and Crispinian. Records of the latter provide the following evidence:

there are to be two dead bodies which are to be dummies filled with straw, and the heads are to be made with masks with calm expressions.³⁹¹

The calm expression of the dummies indicates that the martyrs' imperviousness to pain could be physically performed. Using a dummy body, such as those used in the Majorca saints plays, would make the torture and martyrdom of the Queen appear less realistic, but would have the benefit of conveying her imperviousness to pain. The depiction of the performance of St. Apollonia's martyrdom in fig. 12, in which the torturers are obscuring the audience's sight of her body, suggests the possibility that action such as this could have obscured the dummy body being tortured in order to create a more realistic impression of violence inflicted upon the body. Resistance to suffering is also a key part of the narrative of St. Agatha's own torture and martyrdom in the *Golden Legend* at the hands of her persecutor Quintianus:

If you promise me the wild beasts, the sound of Christ's name will gentle them! If you try fire, angels will serve me with a healing dew from heaven! If you resort to wounds and torments, I have the Holy Spirit, through whom I make naught of all that!³⁹²

As the Queen endures a parallel martyrdom to St. Agatha, this may suggest she also would not have conveyed her pain and suffering. This is supported by the fact that St. Catherine also appears impervious to pain throughout the play. Like the Queen, Catherine's martyrdom may also have used a dummy body in its dramatisation.

In martyring his Queen, Maxentius instructs Cursates to: 'strike off her head / and leave her lying unburied' (*MP St. C*, ll. 512-513). However, the Queen continues to speak after she has been beheaded and buried. In performing the beheading, a dummy body could have conveyed a neutral facial expression, thus portraying the Queen's imperviousness to pain. After her death she goes on to describe her own martyrdom:

because I ignored the emperor's decree,

³⁹¹ As cited in: Meredith and Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama*, p. 110.

³⁹² Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 155.

they passed a cord through my breasts,
and for the sake of your great love
I let them strike off my head
(*MP St. C*, ll. 524-527).

Here, the Queen explains her willing torture and martyrdom through her religious devotion and love for Christ, which is a standard aspect of Christian martyrdom. It is plausible that the Queen physically appeared before the audience to deliver these lines, as she also sings a responsory for the Feast of St. Agatha. The translation of the original Latin stage directions: [s.d. Then the buried queen sings] (*MP St. C*, aft. l. 521), suggests that she sang this herself. The use of a dummy body for the beheading and burial of the Queen would allow her to continue to deliver her lines onstage and to sing the responsory for the Feast of St. Agatha:

You have seen, O Lord, my contest, how I have fought in the
arena; but because I have not been willing to obey the
commands of the princes, I have been sentenced to be tortured
on my breasts.³⁹³

In this performance, the Queen would have been physically visible to the audience after her torture and martyrdom, exhibiting her wounded body before the audience. This responsory for St. Agatha also highlights the parallel between her martyrdom and the Queen's, thus defining the signification of her wounded body.

Conclusion to Christ-Like Wounds and Sacred Wounds:

This section has shown that the wounds of the sacred in medieval drama are always presented in parallel to the wounds of other sacred Christians or Christian martyrs. The Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine* uses such parallels throughout: Queen Faustina echoes St. Agatha in her parallel tortures, and Catherine echoes Christ. The Naked Man in *Bewnans Meriasek* also provides a parallel to Christ through his wounded body, portraying the idea that Christ is in all people. This is echoed in the metaphorical wound of the grief of the Virgin Mary in the N-Town *Crucifixion* where Mary's wound parallels the physical and emotional wounds of Christ as well as the physical wounds of the martyrs.

³⁹³ See notes to: *The Mühlhausen Play of St. Catherine*, ed. Wright, p. 146.

Negative Wounds

Reverse Parallel Wounds in *The Death of Pilate*:

In the *Death of Pilate*, which extends from lines 1587-2360 in the Cornish *Resurrexio Domini*, a reverse parallel is drawn between the Passion of Christ and the proposed torture and murder of Pilate. This culminates in Pilate's suicide, with his fatal wound to his heart mirroring the side wound of Christ.

It is the Emperor Tiberius Caesar who intends to kill Pilate as a form of revenge for the death of Christ. Tiberius agrees to undertake these actions on the orders of Veronica, following his cure from leprosy, for she commands him to 'Take retribution of him' (*DoP*, l. 1753). Notably, in the Emperor's grief for Christ, he speaks of the 'sorrow on my heart' (*DoP*, l. 1765). As this is evocative of the sorrow of Christ and his heart wound, Pilate's suicide also provides a reverse parallel to the emotional wound of the Emperor.

The parallel between the proposed torture and murder of Pilate and the Passion of Christ can be seen in the discussions that ensue between the Emperor and his Executioners on inflicting suffering upon Pilate's body. The parallel is also highlighted in the visual dramatisation of the play, since Pilate is wearing a garment taken from Christ's own body. Moreover, it is plausible that Pilate's suicide would have been staged using blood, just like performances of the side wound of Christ. Despite the serious content of the play there is also a dark comic tone that surrounds the potential torture of Pilate, and in attempting to bury his cursed body after his suicide. This comic tone serves to highlight the ironic parallel between Christ and Pilate.

Pilate's Body and the Reverse Parallel to the Passion:

As Pilate is brought before the Emperor Tiberius, the Emperor welcomes and expresses his love for him, despite his ambition to seek revenge, treating him as if he were Christ:

O Pilate! thou art most welcome,
For I love thee, God witnesses it
(*DoP*, ll. 1811-1812).

The Emperor later reflects to Veronica that as he could not find any reason to kill Pilate he must be 'a wizard and a great sorcerer' (*DoP*, l. 1854). Christ is also accused of witchcraft in the York *Trial Before Pilate*, among other, similar plays. Veronica responds that Pilate cannot be killed:

As long as is about him
The cloth of Jesus, who was on the cross tree
(*DoP*, ll. 1864-1865).

Consequently, she advises him to have the garment removed if he is to succeed in killing Pilate. Thus, Pilate also parallels Christ through his costume, locating the comparison between the characters through their bodies. Pilate refuses to remove the garment of Christ since: 'It is not clean, but dirty' (*DoP*, l. 1927). This evidence of the garment's intimate contact with Christ during the Passion suggests that it would have been responded to as a relic with divine properties. This explains the Emperor Tiberius' initial love for Pilate, and thus highlights the inherent contrast between the garment and its wearer, emphasising the ironic parallel between Christ and Pilate. Pilate continues to argue that he would be 'naked' (*DoP*, l. 1942) if he removed the garment, thus providing another parallel to Christ before his scourging. Notably, the tortures that are suggested for Pilate are also evocative of the scourging of Christ, for the Second Executioner expresses his desire to 'knock him / All to pieces' (*DoP*, l. 1892-1893).

Once Pilate has removed the garment, the Emperor intends to give him a swift death, but Veronica objects, advising him to seek:

the most cruel death
That he can have
(*DoP*, ll. 1972-1973).

The Servant suggests that Pilate should be put in the lowest pit among the gutters, and that he should endure Fellow Jolyf: 'a smart whip, / To stir him up' (*DoP*, ll. 2010-2014), once again evoking the scourging. The Gaoler continues this comic tone, agreeing:

Take and cast him into prison,
Nor spare, though he make a noise;

He is a block-head
(*DoP*, ll. 2014-2016).

This is part of the dark humour that surrounds the suicide of Pilate. There is also a clear lack of sympathy for Pilate who is dehumanised when he is described to be 'worse than a dog' (*DoP*, l. 2026), whereas Christ *is* humanised in death in a number of plays. Whilst these descriptions of a cruel death reflect upon the suffering that Christ endured in the Passion, the dark humour makes it apparent that the parallel is ironic.

As an effect of overhearing the tortures proposed for him, Pilate fears the cruelty of his impending death and commits suicide by wounding his heart:

From that I will yet preserve myself;
So that no man in the world may
Do a cruel death to me;
For my heart, myself
With a knife I will pierce
(*DoP*, ll. 2039-2043).

Pilate's symbolic death and his bleeding heart provide a reverse parallel to the death of Christ. His decision to commit suicide would have been regarded as sinful, indicating that he does not believe in Christ's mercy. Thus, Pilate's final words represent his cowardice, and his escape from torture is a reverse parallel to Christ's endurance of suffering.

After his death, it proves physically impossible to bury Pilate, continuing the play's dark humour. As the Servant and the Gaoler attempt to bury Pilate for the first time, the stage directions indicate: [s.d. And then he shall be thrown out of the earth] (*DoP*, aft. l. 2086), which the Servant sees as proof that Pilate 'is a devil' (*DoP*, l. 2088). This continues his parallel to Christ, for whereas Christ's resurrection proves his sanctity and divinity, Pilate's animation in death proves the opposite.

The emphasis given to the terrible smell of Pilate's dead body is another striking feature to consider – the Emperor states that:

He will kill with the smell

All my kingdom
(*DoP*, ll. 2133-2134).

This awful smell is specifically referred to in the context of Pilate's evil character when the Emperor orders his executioners:

Take the body of the wicked fellow,
Which is now stinking through the country
(*DoP*, ll. 2159-2160).

These descriptions of Pilate's evil and stinking body are significant in the context of unholy wounds emitting an unpleasant smell, such as those of Henry of Grosmont in the *Book of Holy Medicines*. It also provides a contrast to the sweet smell of the bodily remains of martyrs in Roman catacombs, continuing to embody their holiness – highlighting how Pilate's remains continue to embody his wickedness. Overall, in the *Death of Pilate* the body of Pilate in life and death is treated as a reverse parallel to the Passion and resurrection of Christ, thus emphasising the evil of Pilate and the moral and spiritual contrast between them.

The Ironic Wounds of the Vices in *Mankind*:

Mankind is a fifteenth-century morality play in which the central protagonist Mankind undergoes a moral journey, initially tempted by the sinful life but later absolved of his sins through redemption. The play is a psychomachia: a battle between good and evil forces for the soul of Mankind. The three evil forces are New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought, who represent worldly pleasures and are controlled by Mischief. As the vices of the play represent ideas and concepts rather than people, this affects the representation and signification of the wounds they receive in this play.

Mankind's genre as a comedy is another essential consideration in the representation of wounds in this play. However, despite the farcical presentation of the wounds of the vices, even these wounds are presented in an ironic reference to the wounds of Christ and other sacred figures. Thus, contrasting significations of wounds co-exist in this play.

Wounds and the Soul:

Mercy's final reflection on sinfulness at the end of the play, uses a metaphor which is of central importance to understanding the signification of wounds in *Mankind*:

Yf ye fele yoursylffe trappyd in the snare of your gostly enemy,
Aske mercy anon; beware of the contynuaunce.
Whyll a wond ys fresch yt ys provyd curabyll be surgery,
That yf yt procede ovyrlong, yt ys cawse of gret grevans
(*Mankind*, ll. 855-858).³⁹⁴

Here, Mercy uses a medieval understanding of wounds in order to convey that sin wounds the soul. It suggests that the effect of sin can be redeemed like a fresh wound can be healed with medical intervention, but the long duration of a wound places the body (and therefore the soul) at risk. Throughout the play, the vices not only endeavour to entice Mankind with sin, thus attempting to wound his soul, but receive physical wounds themselves in the process. These wounds highlight the moral corruption of the vices in their ironic parallels to sacred wounds.

Mercy's moralisation of wounds is also important since there are a number of references to the wounds of Christ's body, as well as (ironic) allusions to holy martyrs such as St. Quentin and St. Denys throughout the play. Thus, wounds possess a spectrum of signification in *Mankind*. Since Mankind is tempted by vices that each represent worldly pleasures, the wounds of these vices emphasise that the battle for good and evil that each of us face is located in our bodies. This is why the medical care of wounds is used – it is the definition of wounds as the disruption of the continuity of the body that suggests the damage of the integrity of the soul.

Wounds first appear in the text when New-Guise (who is hidden from Mankind and Mercy, along with Nowadays and Nought), states:

I have a grett wonde on my hede, lo! And theron leyth a playster,
Ande another ther I pysse my peson
(*Mankind*, ll. 247-248).

³⁹⁴ *Mankind*, ed. K. Ashley and G. NeCastro (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/ashley-and-necastro-mankind>> All further references are to this edition.

New-Guise has sustained injuries to his head and groin, although there are no stage directions to indicate when this has happened. Although this may be due to the manuscript's missing leaf, it is also possible that New-Guise has a bandaged wound to his head from the beginning of the play as well as a wound to the groin. Since the medical metaphor made by Mercy at the end of the play uses wounds to signify a breach in moral integrity, it is significant that the vice is wounded. The wound to his groin also creates humour since it is addressed with vulgar language. Thus, even though wounds have not yet become a moral symbol, the vulgarity of New-Guise, situates his wounds in the comedy of the play.

The vices next receive wounds in another comic scene after which they each respond to their wounds in an immoral or religious context – furthering the connection between their wounded bodies and moral and spiritual impairment. The central protagonist Mankind, who is defending himself against the three vices, threatens to strike New-Guise, Nowadays and Nought, for he declares: 'wyth my spade I shall yow dyngge, by the Holy Trinyté!' (*Mankind*, l. 377). After Mankind strikes the vices, New-Guise bewails: 'Alas, my jewellys! I shall be schent of my wyff!' (*Mankind*, l. 381), showing concern that he will be deprived of enjoying sexual pleasure. As the audience is aware that New-Guise is already injured in his groin, the strike of Mankind would exacerbate this injury in a moment of comic violence. Following their wounds, Nowadays complains that he has: 'such a buffett!' (*Mankind*, l. 388) ironically evoking the buffeting of Christ, and Nought blasphemes: 'By cokyys body sakynde, I have such a peyn in my arme' (*Mankind*, l. 390). Swearing by God's body is significant in the idea of the warning to swearers, in which Christ's body is dismembered anew by blasphemous language. It is in these respects that the vices begin to use their bodies in an ironic contrast to the bodies of Christ and other sacred Christians.

In contrast, it is interesting that Mankind specifically threatens to hit the vices with his spade in the name of God, as this punishment, although not divinely inflicted, is portrayed as an act of devotion. Allegorically, as Mankind's spade signifies Adam's penalty for original sin (to labour for his food), it is symbolic of the human condition. As Mankind uses his spade as a weapon to wound and drive away

vice, this implies that Mankind's battle against evil forces is also part of the labour of the human condition. As these three wounds are made to unholy characters in the name of the Holy Trinity, the act of wounding the vices draws attention to this moral contrast, signifying their impaired souls.

Mischief's confidence in his ability to heal Nowadays' head through the ridiculous treatment of cutting it off and reattaching it, parodies the healing miracles associated with Christianity, and undermines their sanctity and validity:

Lady, helpe! Sely darlynge, ven, ven!
I shall helpe thee of thi peyn;
I shall smytt of thi hede and sett yt on agayn
(*Mankind*, ll. 433-435).

This is also an ironic method of cure since it would inflict more damage than the original wound, creating further comedy. The informal command to the Virgin Mary 'Lady, helpe!' (*Mankind*, l. 433) is also comic in its tone, and emphasises the spiritual impairment of Mischief in his absence of devotion. Although the vices play with the idea of beheading Nowadays, it does not actually take place. Nowadays' own response to beheading highlights that it would divide him into two, pointing out the obvious irony of such a cure:

Ye, Cristys crose, wyll ye smyght my hede away?
Ther wer on and on! Oute! Ye shall not assay.
I myght well be callyde a foppe
(*Mankind*, l. 442-444).

In addition to creating humour, these words are also blasphemous as Nowadays uses Christ's cross as an exclamation. Thus, Christ's sacred wounds are recalled in connection with the wounds of the vices.

Although Nowadays is never actually beheaded, there are references throughout the play to beheaded martyrs: Nought swears by St. Quentin (*Mankind*, l. 271) and alludes to St. Denys (*Mankind*, l. 487), drawing a parallel between himself with these martyrs. St. Denys is not only beheaded, but his body is said to have risen

from the dead and carried his severed head, demonstrating a similarity to Mischief's belief that Nowadays could be healed after his head is removed.³⁹⁵

The head wound of Nowadays is mentioned later in the text as the three vices speak with the devil Titivillus. Nowadays asks Titivillus to: 'Remember my brokyn hede in the worschyppe of the fyve vowellys' (*Mankind*, l. 497), who subsequently promises to avenge the injuries of the vices. Ashley and NeCastro have speculated that 'five vowels' may be a malapropism for the five wounds of Christ, which would draw a direct comparison to the wounds of Nowadays and Christ.³⁹⁶ The consistent use of the ironic parallel wounds and the parody of St. Denys' martyrdom reflect the spiritual impairment of the vices due to the moral contrast of these characters.

Nought, like Mankind, also uses God's name in order to wound, during a playful mock amputation of Nought's arm. Nought continues to undermine the power of Christianity to heal as he pretends to chop off his arm *in nomine patris* [in the name of the father]:

As for me, I have non harme.
I were loth to forbere myn arme.
Ye pley *in nomine patris*, choppe!
(*Mankind*, ll. 438-440).

His use of words that parallel Christian prayer has the effect of parodying religious conventions, thus highlighting his spiritual impairment. The very idea of Nought's amputation is ironic, since, once again, this would create a wound greater than he has already sustained from being hit by Mankind.

Mankind uses its verbal and physical comedy to highlight the ironic parodies of Christ and other sacred Christians, enabling the impaired spiritual conditions of the vices to be displayed before the audience. Highlighted by their consistent blasphemy, the wounds of the vices act as a moral warning – as allegorical characters this warning is not of physical harm, but of impaired spiritual condition through damage to the soul.

³⁹⁵ See: "Denis of Paris", in: *Holy People of the World: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia, Volume 1*, ed. Phyllis G. Jestice (California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 226-227.

³⁹⁶ See notes to line 497 of *Mankind*, ed. Ashley and NeCastro.

Conclusion to Negative Wounds:

This section has shown that even the wounds of immoral characters in medieval drama are always presented in parallel to the wounds of other sacred Christians. Like the Cornish *Death of Pilate*, the morality play *Mankind* uses ironic and reverse parallels to the suffering of Christ and other holy figures. In both plays, these ironic wounds are framed in comic contexts in order to draw specific attention to the moral contrast the parallels highlight. It is only in mirroring sacred wounds that the wounds of the immoral are used to signify their sinfulness.

3) Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the wounded, mutilated and dismembered body in terms of its spectrum of moral, religious and spiritual significations. The consistent association of wounds with the sacred wounds of Christians is particularly interesting, since this is the case even for immoral and sinful characters such as Pilate and the vices of *Mankind*. The same is also true of the other wounds discussed in my previous chapters, such as the wounds of the Jews of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. However, the wound to Malchus' ear does not parallel the wounds of the sacred in any way, even though it is used to portray Christ's power to heal. As records suggest that Fergus is wounded in the York *Funeral of the Virgin*, his disability is highly likely to have signified the spiritual incompleteness of the unconverted Jew. Thus, although the wounds of the Jews break the pattern of signifying the wounds of Christ and the martyrs, it suggests that it is their *Jewishness* that defines the signification of their wounds. This identity therefore results in different implications for the wounded Jewish body than the wounded and non-Jewish body (even though the wounds of the Jews could also parallel Christ's body in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*). Outside of these examples, the spectrum of signification of wounds and dismemberment within medieval drama seems to be consistently connected to Christ's body and the bodies of Christian martyrs.

There is a contrast in the signification of wounds, mutilation and dismemberment when it is applied to the bodies of Christians as opposed to the enemies or opponents of Christianity. For Christ and the martyrs, wounds can be a glorification of suffering and a triumph of the 'wholeness' of their moral and spiritual

condition. As the narrative of St. Agatha in the *Golden Legend* highlights, there is an idea that the more suffering the body sustains the more the soul is prepared for heaven. Yet, in *Mankind* the medical description of wounds is used to portray the *damage* of the soul. This is comparable to the *Book of Holy Medicine*, for Henry of Grosmont uses medical approaches to wound care to reflect on his impaired moral condition. Also comparable is the reverse parallel wound sustained by Pilate in the Cornish *Death of Pilate*. Rather than glorifying his 'wholeness' Pilate's wounds reflect his evil character, as highlighted by his stinking body after death. Whilst, like the vices, Pilate's wounds portray his moral and spiritual impairment, his wounds are sustained under a specific narrative of Tiberius' revenge for Christ. Pilate's heart wound conveys his personal sinfulness whereas the wounds of the vices represent spiritual impairment more generally because the characters are allegorical.

Yet sacred wounds are more complex than being *only* symbols of glory or positive symbols in general. Whilst this is the case for St. Catherine, more broadly, her wounds are also symbolic of her suffering, sacrifice, resistance, devotion, and divinity. Thus, whilst I refer to the 'positive wounds' of the virtuous Christian characters throughout this chapter, this is not to deny the complex spectrum of signification that the wounds of the virtuous can possess. For instance, the metaphorical wound of the Virgin's grief in the N-Town *Crucifixion*, which signifies her love for Christ as a mother, provokes the audience to empathise with her, and thus to feel love, compassion and grief for Christ – a wide range of emotions and responses. The Naked Man is a further example, for despite his parallel to Christ, his wounds represent his need for charity and the lack of love that man has shown to him. Neither are Christ's wounds a solely positive symbol, as the use of his wounds as an accusation of sin in the York *Doomsday* demonstrates. As I have argued throughout this chapter, Christ's wounds have their own spectrum of signification. Outside of Christ's body, wounds, mutilation and dismemberment are consistently symbolic of the wounded body of Christ or the holy martyrs.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has explored the construction, representation and signification of specific types of disability, impairment and embodied difference in medieval drama. This was specifically considered through the older body, the unconverted Jewish body, the leprous body, and the wounded, mutilated and dismembered body. In order to consider the spectrum of signification, in each of my chapters I examined a range of characters from the sacred to the profane, since the condition of the body was thought to have a complex interrelation with the soul. Like many previous studies of disability and impairment in medieval cultural, historical and literary sources, this examination of drama has observed the ambivalent meanings and significations of such conditions.

In chapter one, it emerged that the physical, psychological and behavioural aspects of ageing are consistently used to signify the moral and spiritual condition of older characters. In my second chapter, I explored how the disabled or impaired Jewish body always signifies its moral impairment and spiritual alterity. My third chapter examined how leprosy is used inconsistently, but either according to the leper's relationship with Christianity, or in promotion of the faith. In chapter four, I argued that even when considering a moral spectrum of characters, wounds are often symbolic of the wounds of Christ and the sacred. Over the course of these chapters I found that the same types of disability, impairment, or sickness were used inconsistently in medieval drama, and could therefore be used to signify the virtues or vices of a character, according to context.

Perhaps what is particularly striking about my own observations into the ambivalence of disability is how inconsistently it can be portrayed even across a single play-text: in *Bewnans Meriasek* the Emperor Constantine's leprosy is a negative characteristic which signifies his immorality, but the leprosy of the First and Second Leper is neutral: making no direct reflection on their vices or virtues (even though we can speculate that these characters are worthy of the cure they receive). Similarly, in the *Ordinalia*, the leprosy of the Emperor Tiberius is neutral, but is positive for the Smith as a divine gift. Thus, disability is always symbolic beyond itself

in medieval drama, but from play to play, the disabled or impaired body can vary greatly in what it signifies.

As Metzler has noted in her research into medieval disability and impairment, 'no discussion of medieval bodies could be complete without reference to sin'.³⁹⁷ Over the chapters of this thesis it has emerged that disability is indeed consistently presented as a moral category in drama, but one that might relate either to sin or to virtue. Furthermore, since the moral and spiritual condition of characters can change over the course of a play, the meaning of specific types of disability or affliction can be unstable even within a single body. In some instances, disability and impairment have a neutral signification, in the sense that they do not reflect upon the character's own moral or spiritual condition. These neutral representations of the disabled or impaired body are each used to display the power of Christianity, and provide evidence that, in medieval drama, disability is always symbolic beyond itself, rather than providing an exploration of such conditions in their own right.

This prompts us to consider what attention, if any, is given to exploring disability and impairment as physiological or psychological afflictions in their own right. Of course, the attention given to representations of individual conditions changes in relation to the circumstances they impose upon the characters, thus providing for different explorations of the physical suffering, emotional distress, social limitations, or other effects the afflictions cause. The physical suffering experienced by the characters appears to be a consistent feature in the representation of disability and impairment in medieval drama, even when the signification of the condition is neutral. Yet the moral identity of the characters plays a crucial role in how we respond to representations of their suffering and limitations precisely *because* these conditions are consistently presented as a moral category in drama. Responses to affliction, such as the vices bewailing their wounds in *Mankind* or Constantine's distress at the physical ugliness of his leprosy in *Bewnans Meriasek*, may provide insight into the experiences of these conditions, but this is limited or even obscured by the symbolic function of affliction. The wounds of the vices in *Mankind* are received in a comic context and the physiological damage they endure

³⁹⁷ Metzler, "Disability in Medieval Europe" p. 55.

is part of a metaphor for their impaired souls – consequently, their experiences are not ‘realistic’. Since it is a divine punishment, Constantine is morally accountable for his own leprosy. Thus, what can be read as a representation of his experience of the disease is much more obviously a representation of his retribution. Even for virtuous characters, suffering endured is not consistently realistic: the martyrs appear to be impervious to pain in the Mühlhausen *Play of St. Catherine*, and Simeon’s natural age-related weakness and frailty is reversed in the York *Purification*. It is through these examples that we can understand how disability and impairment are always symbolic beyond themselves. Rather than providing an exploration of conditions such as age-related impairment in their own right – the symbolic uses of disability and impairment detract from or negate their reality.

The Blind Man in the Chester *Glovers’ Play* is a particularly significant example of the focus on the *signification* of disability rather than the condition itself. Specifically, his blindness is interpreted as a possible manifestation of original, personal, or inherited sin, taking us back to the moral categorisation of disability and impairment. The different approaches of Peter and John in how they interpret the moral causes of the Blind Man’s disability highlight the complexity of the disabled or impaired body in medieval cultural thought, in addition to the complex interrelationship of the body and the soul. Yet, this episode also raises an alternative use of disability – to highlight the power of God, thus demonstrating, again, how disability is always symbolic beyond itself. It is important that congenital blindness is never directly mentioned or considered *without a moral cause*. Even according to Christ, the disability of the Blind Man fulfils a specific purpose, since he speaks of its role:

to sett forth Goddes great glorie,
his power to shewe manifestlye,
this mans sight to reforme
(C. GP, ll. 56-58).

This explanation of the dramatic function of disability also highlights the lack of attention that the affliction of the Blind Man is afforded in its own right. Such religious perspectives and interpretations of the function of forms of disability,

impairment and affliction, which are often voiced in medieval drama, demonstrate another reason that such conditions can only ever be symbolic beyond themselves. The Blind Man also underlines exactly why disability may have a variety of causes and significations in medieval drama.

Whilst experiences of disability are not always realistic, the ideas and even symbolic values of specific conditions often reflected contemporary social attitudes. For instance, there are positive and negative instances of leprosy in medieval drama just as there were positive and negative social responses to the disease. In drama, conditions can still be representative of social, cultural and medical constructions even if the experience of the condition is not portrayed 'realistically'. Drama is therefore a useful source to examine, in terms of how it uses ideas about forms of disability, impairment and affliction, and embodies these ideas through physical performance: this is why the theatrical representations of these conditions merit investigation. The use of these conditions also provides valuable insight into the effects drama is trying to achieve – the example of the Blind Man and his interpretation by Christ shows us how medieval people developed their faith in Christianity by relating to *ideas* of the disabled or impaired body that specifically showcase the power of God.

For each of my chapters, the conditions I discuss demonstrate ambivalence in their contrasting meanings. This ambivalence has been a consistent theme in this thesis, which acknowledges the changing and contrasting significations of disability, impairment and embodied difference according to the context. Overall, in presenting an analysis of the uses and significations of disability, impairment and embodied difference in medieval drama, this thesis reveals how dramatic representations of these conditions are embedded in their historical and cultural contexts, even if the experience of the condition is not portrayed 'realistically'. It is because drama provides an extra dimension in its physical embodiment and performance of disability and impairment, that it can offer such an important, striking and multivalent means of signification.

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Appendix

1. Helen F. Smith, "Sinfulness, Sanctity and Bodily Transgressions: Representations of Ageing, Disability and Impairment in Late-Medieval Drama" *Mirabilia* 18:1 (2014): pp. 206-224.

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2. Helen F. Smith, "The Afflicted Jewish Body: Cure and Conversion in Medieval Drama" Selected Proceedings from 'The Maladies, Miracles and Medicine of the Middle Ages' ed. Ruth Salter. *The Reading Medievalist: A Postgraduate Journal* 2 (2015): pp. 109-134.

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